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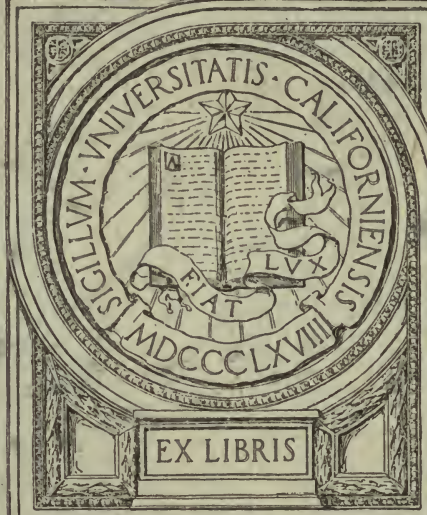

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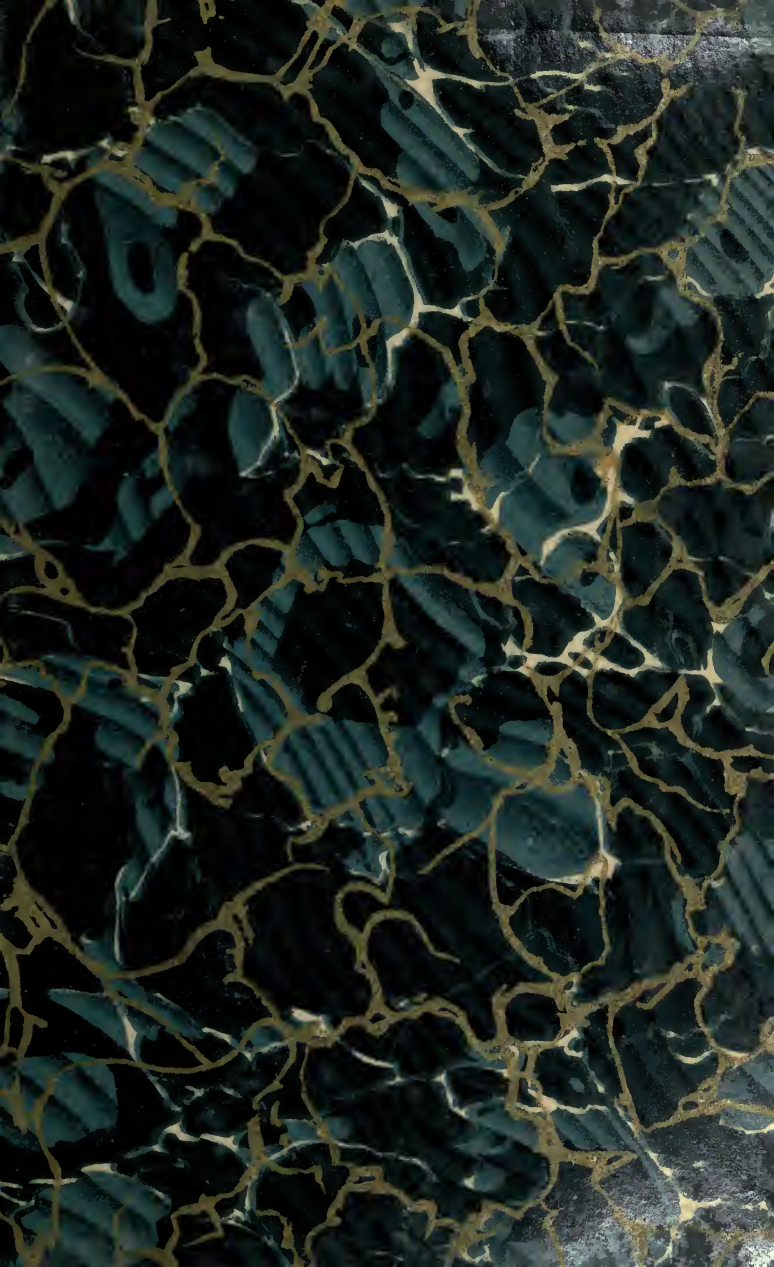

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THE WHITE DOVE

BY

WILLIAM J. LOCKE

O White Dove of the Pity Divine
J. H. SKRINE

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

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THE WHITE DOVE

CHAPTER I

FATHER AND SON

"LIFE is a glorious thing," said the girl.

Sylvester Lanyon looked at her half in amusement, half in wistfulness. There was no doubt whatever of her sincerity. Therein lay the pathetic. To reply that the shadow of death and suffering clouded life's glory was too obvious a rejoinder. So he smiled and said,—

"Well?"

"We ought to conquer it, make it our own, and live it to the full."

"If it is to be conquered by us weak wretches, it can't be such a glorious thing," he remarked.

"But who said we were weak wretches?" she retorted. "You 're not one, and I 'm not one!" She laughed, flushing a little. "No, I 'm not," she repeated.

If Sylvester Lanyon had been endowed with the power of graceful words, here was a chance

for a pretty compliment. It was challenged by the girl's self-conscious glance and by the splendid vitality of her youth; for Ella Defries usually carried the air of a conqueror with a certain sweet insolence. Some such idea passed vaguely through his mind, but, unable to express it, he said, shifting his ground lamely, —

"You see I 'm getting elderly."

"Nonsense!" she said. "You 're only five and thirty. My own age to a day."

"I don't quite follow," said he.

"A woman is always ten years older than a man. You ought to know that."

"And that proves?"

"That you ought to go into the world and win fame and mix with the brilliant men and women in London who can appreciate you."

"I don't want to mix with more brilliant men and women than those who are under this roof of Woodlands," said Sylvester.

Ella flushed again, but this time she drooped her eyes and bent her head over her sewing for some time abandoned. A smile played round her lips.

"Your Aunt Agatha, for instance."

"No, dear soul. The other two."

He rose and filled his pipe from a tobacco jar on the mantel-piece. The room, furnished with the solid mahogany and leather of a bygone generation, was his father's particular den, where, however, of all rooms in the house, he was least likely to find the privacy for which it was set apart. Ella, during her periodical visits to Ayresford, calmly monopolised it; Sylvester strolled in naturally from his widowed house over the way; Miss Agatha Lanyon, although she pretended to cough at the smoke, would leave her knitting promiscuously about on chairs and tables, while the little grandchild Dorothy spilled the ink with impunity over the Turkey carpet.

There was a silence while Sylvester lit his pipe and settled down again in the leathern armchair by the fire.

"I want no better company than the dear old man's, and yours," said he.

"My conversation is not fit for an intellectual man," said Ella, with a humility that contrasted with her conquering attitude of a few moments before.

"You are a very clever girl," said Sylvester.

She shook her head with a little air of scorn and threw her sewing on the table.

"Oh, no. It pleases my vanity to think so. But what do I know in comparison with you? What can I do? You go to a bedside and hold the keys of life and death in your hand. To you, all the hidden forces and mysteries of nature are every-day commonplaces. Professor Steinthal of Vienna, whom I met the other day at Lady Milmo's, told me that, if you chose, you could become the greatest bacteriologist in Europe."

"Did he say that?" asked Sylvester, eagerly.

"Yes, and that is why you ought to go away and live in London and fulfil your life gloriously."

A look of amusement came into his grave eyes, and lit for a moment the sombreness of a face prematurely careworn.

"I *am* going to London," he said. "I sold the practice this morning."

Ella rose from her chair impetuously. "Why did n't you tell me at once, instead of letting me say all these silly things? It is just like a man."

"You took my apathy so much for granted," he said, laughing.

"I suppose I am a weak wretch, after all," said Ella.

Sylvester put down his pipe and stood by her side.

"It is really all your doing, Ella. This is not the first time you have pointed out my way to me. And it won't be the last, will it?"

There was a note of pathetic appeal in his tone that made her heart beat a little faster. Of all the phases of his manhood that her instinctive feminine alertness had caused him to present to her, this one moved her the most strongly. An unwonted shy tenderness came into her eyes.

"It is for you to settle that," she said.

He looked at her for a moment as if about to speak, but some inward conflict seemed to check the words. A man's memories and dead loves rise up sometimes and stare at him in sad reproach.

"I wish I had the gift of speech," he said.

"What do you want to say?" she asked gently.

He smiled whimsically. "If I could tell you that, I should have the gift."

"You 'll let me see something of you in London, won't you?"

"Why, of course! Whom else should I want

to see? Frodsham's practice is a large one — I am buying a share, you know. A specialist generally has his hands full. I shall have neither the time nor the desire to go about butterflying. Besides, it is only a few people that like me. I 'm generally looked upon as a 'stick.'"

His head had been turned aside; and while there had been no danger of his glance meeting hers, Ella had scanned his face as a girl does that of a man who is already something more to her than friend or brother. It was thin and intellectual, somewhat careworn, with deep vertical lines between the brows. The hair was black and wavy, thinning a little over the temples; the features well cut and sensitive; the eyes, deeply sunken, possessing keenness, but little brilliance; a moustache, standing well away at each end from the cheeks, accentuated their sharp contours. Yet in spite of the intellectual delicacy of the face, the tanned, rough skin, corresponding with the well-knit wiriness of his frame, gave assurance of strong physical health.

The last epithet in his remarks, so at variance with the character she was idealising from her scrutiny, moved her ready indignation.

"I should like to have a quarter of an hour with the fool that said so!" she exclaimed.

"You are loyal to your friends," said Sylvester.

They discussed the point. Ella let loose the fine scorn of five and twenty for the shallow society that could not appreciate a man of his calibre. Her championship was sweet for him to hear. For some time past he had been gradually growing conscious of the force that this sympathetic intelligence and this warm nature were bringing into his life. Unwittingly he had revealed the fact to Ella. As woman, and especially the fresh girl, is responsive, and gives bit by bit of herself, as it is craved, Ella, when she looked into her heart, found much that had been yielded. The situation therefore was sweet and delicate.

"My going will be a blow to my father," he said after a while. "I hardly like to tell him."

"He would n't stand in your way," said Ella. "He 's not like that. We have talked it over scores of times. He is as anxious as I am for you to take your proper place in the world."

"Dear old fellow," said Sylvester, his face

brightening. "He would cut off both his feet for me, gladly. But he would feel the pain all the same."

"Yes, who would n't love him?" said Ella. "I wish I had a father."

"We 'll go shares in him," said Sylvester. "His heart is big enough."

And again the girl coloured and felt very happy, as if the puzzle of her life were being explained to her.

"And Dorothy?"

"That 's where the difficulty comes in. Would London be good for her?"

"Why not leave her here?"

Ella looked at him sharply and saw, as she had expected, the alarm on his face.

"You don't know what she is to me," he said.

"It would cheer Uncle Matthew when you 're gone. He is devoted to her."

He was silent awhile. The thought of parting from the child, the living memory of his dead wife, was a pang whose intensity he could not express even to Ella. She was seven. For four years he had brought her up alone in his own house, under the care of an old family servant who had taught her to read, and say

her prayers, and use her knife and fork in a way befitting her station. The rest of her tiny education Sylvester himself had seen to. She was his constant companion, abroad and at home. He could talk to her as it was in his power to talk to no one else, almost persuading himself that her innocent clear eyes saw into the depths of his heart. To leave her behind was a prospect filled with unspeakable dismay.

"It's a weary world," he said, by way of generalisation.

"It is n't!" cried Ella. "It 's a glorious world, full of love and heroism and beauty. I won't have my dear world abused! It is sweet to be alive in it, to use all one's faculties, to go about among men and women, to hear the rain, to smell the hay—"

"And get hay fever and then come to me — the misanthrope — to cure you. Paganism generally ends that way."

"I should call your being able to cure me a very beautiful thing too," she exclaimed conclusively. "Is n't your knowledge of healing a glorious thing? Oh, don't tell me about the child gathering pebbles by the sea-shore. It was modesty on Newton's part, but mock modesty on that of the people who quote him

now. Children can pick up a tremendous lot of pebbles in two hundred years!"

The door opened and Matthew Lanyon stood on the threshold, with an amused smile on his grave face. For the girl had been speaking with animation, and the fresh colour in her cheeks and the happiness in her eyes made her goodly to look upon.

"Syl annihilated as usual?" he asked, coming forward.

"I hope so. He won't be converted, Uncle Matthew. What do you think of the world? Is n't it a beautiful world?"

"Since it holds you, my dear, how could it be otherwise?"

She laughed and looked at Sylvester with some coquetry. Here was a lesson in compliment by which he might profit. Sylvester thrust forward an armchair for his father.

"Tired?"

"Of course not. What has a healthy man got to do with being tired? No, my dear Ella, please don't. You know I disapprove of cushions. They are for the young and delicate."

"Where shall we have tea?" asked Ella. "Here, or in the drawing-room? Aunt Agatha is in her district."

"Oh, here, then, by all means. We can have it comfortably."

Ella rang the bell and cleared an occasional table of a litter of pipes, cigar-boxes, and papers. Matthew Lanyon lay back in his chair with the air of a man who had earned his home comforts, and stretched out his feet to the fire. Then he put his invariable question, —

"How's Dorothy?"

Sylvester replied, gave the usual bulletin as to her health, recounted the small incidents in the child's day. She had driven with him on his rounds that morning; during one of the waits had urgently requested Peck, the coachman, to die forthwith — straight and stiff — so that she might have the pleasure of seeing how her father brought him to life again. Her mind had been much exercised by a picture in the Family Bible of the raising of Jairus' daughter, and had identified her parent with the chief actor in the scene.

Tea arrived during the narration. Matthew listened with amused interest, for his son and his son's child were the dearest things earth held for him. His wife had died many years ago, when Sylvester was just emerging from

boyhood and the great glory had gone out of his heaven. But his love for Sylvester had deepened, and of late years the sad parallelism of their widowed lives had drawn the two men very near together. In many ways they were singularly alike, the mere facial resemblance stamping them at the first glance as father and son; both were grave, intellectual-looking men, of the same clean, wiry make, with an air of reserve and good breeding that commanded respect. But the older man possessed that peculiar grace of manner, called nowadays of the old school, which the brusquer habits of more modern times have forbidden to flourish. Both faces bore the marks of suffering; but the passage of the years had chastened that of the father, who looked more frankly at the world than the son and out of kindlier grey eyes. He was a little over sixty, his hair whitening fast; still he held himself erect, and scoffed satirically at old age.

"The prime of life, my dear sir," he would say, "the heyday of existence! Up to sixty a man gathers his experience and tears his fingers dreadfully. After sixty he can sit down quietly and enjoy it and let his fingers heal."

There was a pause in the talk, and the three

sat, as they often did, content to be together, looking into the fire and thinking their own thoughts. Perhaps the girl's were the happiest. The room had darkened, and the firelight played on their faces gathered round the hearth. Suddenly Sylvester spoke.

"I was talking to Ella about my plans, father, before you came in."

"A very sensible person to talk to," said Matthew.

"I've burned my ships. I have sold the practice and am going to join Frodsham in London."

"I'm very glad indeed to hear it," said the old man; "you should have done it years ago."

His voice was suave and even, but the keen eye of the physician detected a trembling of the fingers resting on the broad leathern arm of the chair.

"I don't at all like to leave you," said Sylvester, feeling guilty. Matthew waved away the reluctance.

"Nonsense, my boy. I'm not a cripple that requires to be taken care of. Grown up men can't be for ever hanging on to — I was going to say, to each other's apron strings.

London is your place. Perhaps after a time, when I am dead and gone, — a man must die some day, you know, — you 'll like to come back to the old house and devote yourself entirely to research and be independent of two guinea fees and that kind of thing. That would be nice, would n't it, Ella?"

The girl's heart throbbed at the share implied, but a tenderer feeling quieted it at once.

"It would be impossible without you, Uncle Matthew," she said.

He rose with a laugh. "None of us are indispensable, not even the most futile. I 'm going to dress. You 'll dine here, of course, Syl? And, Ella, tell them to get up some of the '84' Pommery to drink good luck to Syl."

He walked out of the room with the brisk air of a man thoroughly pleased with life; but outside, in the passage, his face grew sad, and he mounted the stairs to his dressing-room very slowly, holding on to the balusters.

The younger folks remained for a while longer in the library. Sylvester bent forward and broke a great lump of coal with the poker.

"I 'm not fit to black his boots, you know.

My companionship means much more to him than Dorothy's does to me, and he gives it up without a murmur."

"And that settles the Dorothy question?" asked Ella, in the direct manner that sometimes embarrassed him.

"Of course it settles it," he cried warmly. "What a selfish beast you must have thought me!"

"If you did n't love others so warmly, I should n't —"

She came to a dead stop because his eyes were full upon her.

"Well?"

"I should n't care for you so much."

"Do you care very much for me?" he asked rather wistfully, and came to where she was standing with one foot on the fender.

"You know I would do anything in the world you asked," she answered in a low voice.

"Some day I may claim your promise."

"You know I always keep my promises," she said.

The dressing bell clanged loudly through the house. Sylvester hurriedly departed so as to dress in time for dinner. But Ella lingered

by the fire, the girl in her wondering whether she had said too much, and the woman in her filled with a delicious pity for the strong-brained, deep-natured man who seemed dumbly to be holding out his hands for her love. She gave it generously and gratefully. Compared with him, all other men seemed of small account, and in her aunt Lady Milmo's house, where most of her life was spent, she had seen all the sorts and conditions of males that a well-to-do collector of minor celebrities can gather around her in London. But to her direct mind the truest men of her acquaintance were Matthew Lanyon, her former guardian, whose title of uncle was purely one of courtesy, and Sylvester, with whom the old quasi-cousinly relations were being transmuted into sweeter ties.

CHAPTER II

THE SHADOW IN A LIFE

FATHER and son sat together in the dining-room, smoking their after-dinner cigars, and speaking very little, as their custom was when together. With its snow-white table-cloth set off by the glass and cut flowers and the rich purple of the old port in the decanter; with its picture-hung walls, its massive mahogany sideboard gleaming with silver, amid which displayed itself opulently a huge salver presented to Matthew Lanyon, Esquire, by his fellow-townsmen on the completion of his third year of mayoralty; with its great red-shaded lamp suspended over the table, and its dark marble fireplace, — the room had an air of warmth and generous comfort that spoke of a long continuance of worldly ease. In his younger days Matthew Lanyon had roved about the world, picking up much knowledge of men in new lands where life was rude, and a little money wherewith to start a career when he

returned to civilisation. His return was speedier than either himself or his friends had anticipated. The latter beheld him married to a sweet flower-like girl whom he had met not long before in Australia; but more than this they did not learn. He was not given to offering information as to his doings, and there was that suggestion of haughtiness behind his frank young smile which forbade questioning. He was there; his wife was there. The friends must accept both on their merits. He had served his articles as a solicitor before leaving England. He turned to his profession for maintenance and bought a share in a cousin's practice in Ayresford. He was to have made his fortune, gone away again with his young wife into the wide world, and seen all the wonders that it held. But as in the case of many other young dreams, it seemed otherwise to the gods. Wealth had come quickly, and he had added gradually to his little home until it had become a great house, and his cousin had died, and his wife had died, and in Ayresford he had lived all the time, married and widowed, and now the longing for change had gone, and in Ayresford he hoped that he himself would die, in the home endeared to him by so many

memories, in the bed consecrated by the pale sweet shadow of her who even now seemed to lie by his side.

Wealth had come, yet much of it had gone; how, no man knew but himself and one other; he had toiled hard to win it, was toiling hard at sixty to win it back. And how strenuously he toiled, again no man knew; least of all his son.

The desultory talk had drooped. Suddenly Matthew Lanyon plunged his hand in the breast pocket of his dress-coat and drew out an old-fashioned miniature, which, after regarding it for a few moments, he handed to Sylvester.

"I 've been rummaging about to-day and found this. Perhaps you 'd like to have it."

"My mother!" said Sylvester.

It was a portrait, on ivory, of a singularly sweet face, possessing the tender, unearthly purity of one of Lorenzo di Credi's Madonnas, executed when the original was very young, a few months, in fact, before Sylvester was born.

"A very good likeness," said Matthew.

"I shall be glad to keep it," replied the son, putting it into his pocket.

"I thought you would," assented the elder.

"It will be a companion to my miniature of Constance," said Sylvester.

And then silence came again; for memories crowded into the minds of each that they knew not how to speak of. Yet each knew that the other was thinking of his dead wife and wished that he could burst the strange bonds of reserve that held him and speak out that which was in his heart.

"It's a devil of a muddle, is n't it?" said Matthew at last.

"What?"

"The cosmos. And the more one tries to establish order, the worse confounded becomes the confusion. The high gods seem to have given it up as a bad job."

"That reminds me, "said Sylvester, with a laugh. "I found Billings to-day having a glorious drunk on champagne. For a man earning twenty-five shillings a week, with a large family to support and a wife half dying of pneumonia, I thought it rather strong."

Matthew rose from his chair, his brows bent and his eyes kindling with sudden anger.

"The damned hound! What did you do with him?"

"I took him outside so as not to disturb his

wife and then I kicked him until he was sober," replied Sylvester, grimly. "I wonder who could have sent the champagne."

"Some silly fool," said Matthew, nursing his wrath.

"Yet nearer to heaven than most of us," said Sylvester, knocking the ash off his cigar.

"Rubbish!" said Matthew. "Besides, silly fools don't go to heaven. There's no place for 'em."

"I don't think Billings will rob his wife again," remarked Sylvester.

"Well, you can send him up to me in the morning."

"I think he'd sooner have another kicking," laughed Sylvester.

A picture rose before him of the reprobate cringing before his father, wriggling at each sentence as at a whip lash, and going away with two more bottles of wine that would burn his dirty hands like hot bricks. He laughed, but Matthew thrust both hands in his pockets and stood with feet apart on the hearth-rug.

"Did you ever hear of such a mean skunk?"

"You will never fathom the depth of human meanness, father, if you live to be a hundred."

"I thank you for the compliment, Syl,"

replied the old man, drily, "but I happen to think otherwise. May you never live to know it as I do."

"Mr. Usher, sir," said the servant, suddenly throwing open the door.

Matthew started, and glanced instinctively at his son. Sylvester, who had been struck by an unusual note of emotion in his father's voice, was looking at him curiously. So their eyes met in a mutual sensitive glance, and Matthew flushed slightly beneath his tanned and care-lined skin.

"Confound Usher!" muttered Sylvester, irritably.

An elderly man of about Matthew's age appeared, white-bearded, gold-spectacled, wearing a tightly buttoned frock-coat. He was of heavy build and had loose lips and dull watery eyes, the lids faintly rimmed with blood-red. He came forward into the room with extended hand.

"My dear friend, how are you this evening?" he said with a curious deliberation, as if he had duly sucked each word before he spat it out. "And, Sylvester, my dear lad, how are you? I have been very unwell to-day, and the weather has increased my sufferings. You

notice that there is a wheezing in my bronchial tubes. Yet I thought I must come to see you this evening in spite of the weather. I said to Olivia, 'It is a duty, and I must fulfil it.'"

"Pray sit down, Usher," said Matthew, politely. "Let me pass you the port."

"A little port wine would be very good for me. I cannot afford port wine, Matthew, like you, or I should drink it habitually. I should think this was very expensive."

He smacked his loose lips and held the glass up to the light.

"It is a sound wine," said Matthew.

"If you would not put too high a price on it," said the other, in his monotonous voice, "perhaps I might buy some from you. What would you charge?"

"In the market it would fetch about a hundred and eighty shillings a dozen," said Sylvester, savagely.

But his father raised a hand in courteous deprecation.

"I am not a wine-merchant, Usher, and am not in the habit of retailing my cellar. But if you'd accept a dozen, I should be very pleased to send it round to you."

"I will accept it with great pleasure," said

Usher, blandly. "It would hurt your feelings if I refused your generosity. Have you ever remarked how generous your father is, Sylvester?"

The young man moved impatiently in his chair. He could never understand the almost lifelong intimacy that existed between his father and this old man, Usher, whom he held in cordial detestation. So he said nothing, while the guest took a fresh sip of wine, and rolled it appreciatively over his tongue.

"Your father and I were young men together in Australia, Sylvester," he remarked. "Youth is a glorious time, and its friendships last. I never forget my old friends."

"The sentiment does you credit, Usher," said Matthew.

The servant entered with the London evening paper just sent from the railway bookstall. Usher held out a large soft hand for it, and the servant retired.

"I want to see what has happened in the Trevelyan divorce case," he said, unfolding the paper. "I have followed it closely."

A *cause célèbre* was setting England whispering and sniggering, and there were many like Usher who scanned the columns of the news-

papers that evening in pleased anticipation. But Sylvester expressed his distaste.

"How can you read it? The air is reeking sufficiently with the nastiness already."

"I am interested," replied Usher. "I think nothing human alien to me. *Nil humani*, as we used to say at school. I remember my classics. I have a very good memory. Here it is. The jury found Mrs. Trevelyan guilty of adultery with the co-respondent. Damages £5,000 and costs. The judge pronounced a decree nisi; the husband to have custody of the children. I pity the poor woman."

"I don't," said Sylvester, shortly. "Such women are better dead."

"No doubt you are right," returned Usher. "The sacred principles of morality ought to be upheld at any cost. I have always upheld morality. What do you think, Matthew?"

The old man looked steadily at his finger nails and replied in a dispassionate voice, —

"One never knows what lies behind."

Sylvester rose and shrugged his shoulders.

"Wantonness and baseness lie behind. I have no patience with misplaced sympathy in such cases. Here is this woman you are reading about, — she betrayed her husband,

deserted her children. She deserves no pity."

Usher waggled his head indulgently.

"I am a Christian man," he said, "and I have a tender heart. I have always had a tender heart, Matthew."

Sylvester laughed and threw the end of his cigar into the fire. He was half ashamed of having been betrayed into a display of deep feeling before one whom he considered a shallow egotist.

"Well, I have n't," he said. "I 'm going up to the drawing-room. Perhaps you 'll join me."

He nodded to his father and left the room. Matthew edged his chair further from the fire, and wiped his lips and brow with his handkerchief.

"You are getting too warm," said Usher.

"The room is hot. When you have finished your wine, we may as well follow Sylvester."

Usher poured out another glass.

"I am very comfortable," he said. "I always am here. You must be proud to have a son with such sentiments as Sylvester."

Matthew rose abruptly from his seat,

clenched his hands by his side, and bit a quivering lip. Evidently he was mastering some impulse of anger.

"Drink your wine and come upstairs," he said.

The other looked at him askance and hesitated. Then yielding, as it were, to compulsion, he gulped down the contents of his glass and rose with watery eyes.

"It was a sin to do that," he said with a sigh. "You always were an unreasonable fellow, Matthew. I only said I was glad that Sylvester held such opinions. Most young men nowadays are shockingly lax in their principles."

Matthew did not reply, but with cold, imperturbable face opened the door for him to pass out. Usher hung back.

"I must speak to you about my son Roderick. Business before pleasure. It has been my constant rule in life."

"What has Roderick been doing now?" asked Matthew, closing the door again.

"He is bringing my grey hairs in sorrow to the grave again," replied Usher. "My son and your son — what a difference, Matthew! 'T is sharper than — "

"Rubbish! What 's the matter, man?"

"A serpent's tooth, to have a thankless child. I dislike being interrupted. Matthew, Roderick has gone to the Jews. The bills have fallen due. They won't renew, and if they are not paid, they 'll put him in prison. I cannot have my son in prison."

"Get him out, then," replied Matthew. "I can't do more for him than I do. I promised, years ago, that what Sylvester had, Roderick should have, and, by Heaven! I 've kept my promise. I can't do more. You can't draw blood from a stone."

"As if any one ever wanted to. Proverbs are foolish. I never make use of proverbs. I think you must take up those bills."

"And if I don't?"

Usher shrugged his shoulders and, sitting down again, refilled his glass and held it up to the light. Matthew stood on the hearth-rug, his hands behind him, and regarded him impassively.

"I gave you Roderick's quarterly allowance only a short while ago. What has he done with it?"

"I do not know," said Usher, impressively, turning his dull venerable face towards him. "He has nearly ruined me already."

"Have you brought his letters with you?"

"I burned his letters. It is imprudent to keep compromising letters. But I have made out a statement of affairs."

Usher took from his pocket a double sheet of foolscap, smoothed it out and examined it deliberately, then handed it to Matthew. The latter glanced through the statement. His lips quivered for a moment.

"This is practically fraud," he said. "A magistrate might commit on it, a jury find a verdict of guilty, and then —"

"His dear mother's memory," said Usher, wagging his head solemnly.

Matthew involuntarily clenched the paper tight in his hand.

"Damn you!" he said. Then he repeated it. "Damn you!"

But Usher stretched out a deprecating hand and spoke in tones of gentle reproach.

"You must be calm, my dear friend. I am always calm. I have never said a word in all my life that I have had cause to regret. Not even this morning, when Olivia with great carelessness destroyed a new book-plate. And it was a very valuable book-plate. It be-

longed to Hugh, the first Earl of Lawford, of Edward III.'s creation."

"Are you aware that your own son is in danger of penal servitude?" asked Matthew, sharply.

"Why, of course. Is not that my reason for coming to you? I put the matter into your hands, as lawyer and friend and second father to my erring boy, and I am content. Yes, I am content, for I have trust in you. Shall we go up now and join the ladies?"

Matthew bit the end off another cigar and lighted it. Then, as if his guest had made the most natural and relevant proposal in the world, he said with a courtesy not devoid of grimness,—

"My sister is not feeling very well this evening, and the young folks might be happier alone together, so perhaps we'll not go upstairs. And as this affair of Roderick's will give me some thinking, you'll excuse me if I leave you shortly."

"You are right," replied Usher, rising ponderously. "The night air is not good for me. I suffer much from my bronchial tubes. I must have some one fitter than Olivia to nurse me. Servants are never grateful for the bounties one heaps on them. If only Miss

Defries would look upon Roderick as favourably as she does upon Sylvester, how happily things could be arranged."

There was not a spark of cunning or rearward thought in his dim, unspeculative eyes. Yet Matthew felt a sudden pang of suspicion at his last words, and scanned his face intently. Was it the first hint of some scheme long maturing in his dull yet tenacious brain, or the mere surface fancy of the egotist? He could not tell, although he flattered himself that he knew the man's soul as a priest his breviary, — every line and phrase, every thumb-mark and dog's ear.

"I think the less said about Roderick for some time, the better," he remarked, ringing the bell. Then before the servant came, he said suddenly, —

"But, by Heaven! this is the last time. Understand that. Once more, and I break down the whole structure though it kill me — carry the war into your quarters and tell Roderick all."

Usher's face was shadowed by a faint smile.

"My dear friend, Roderick has known all his life. I could never leave my son in ignorance. I gave him the best training."

The servant appeared. Usher extended his hand, which the other touched mechanically, and in another moment was gone, leaving Matthew staring incredulously, conscious of utter dismay.

"Is he lying?" he asked himself, a short while later, as he paced the library, whither he had betaken himself with the money-lending document. "Can the boy be such a blackguard? He must be lying." But how base the lie was in reality, even he could not surmise.

The boy was a man of forty now, yet Matthew had watched and paid for every step upward and downward in his career. He remembered him a handsome and wayward child, a wild lad, a young man brilliant in promise, yet unstable as water, excelling in naught. He had seen him by turns poet, painter, journalist, social reformer, musical critic, dramatist, always obtaining successes of estimation, always floating iridescent and futile as froth on the waves of literary and artistic London. What Roderick was doing now, he did not know. For some time past he had heard little of him. Now he had come to light again somewhat luridly. A foolish friend had backed bills under false representations. The Jews were

pressing, the friend recalcitrant. It was a criminal matter. If he were guilty of this, why not of that knowledge of which his father boasted so cynically? Matthew's face grew worn and hard. He unlocked a safe, drew therefrom a small padlocked ledger, and sitting down at his desk began to pore over its contents. Roderick must be saved this time at any cost, for his mother's sake, as Usher had remarked. At the reminiscence Matthew reiterated his execration.

After long, anxious thought, he made a rough calculation on a scrap of paper, and leaning back in his chair regarded it until something dim, like tears, came across his vision.

"My poor Syl," he said, "I have to rob you — for your own happiness."

And at that moment, just outside the door stood Sylvester and Ella bidding each other good-night. The full glow of the hall lamp shone down upon her radiant young face, as he held both her hands in his, and made a glinting aureole of her hair. Suddenly he laughed awkwardly and kissed her; with a half-mirthful, half-reproachful "Oh, you should n't!" she snatched away her hands

and ran up the stairs. He stood and watched the last gleam of her skirts disappear and then entered his father's room.

Matthew closed his ledger and looked up with one of his rare smiles.

"Going, Syl?"

"Yes. I've been sent for, as usual. It's all very well for me to work at this ungodly hour. I'm a medical man, and I'm young. But I don't like to see you at it. You're overdoing it, father."

"Nonsense!" replied Matthew, cheerily; "I'm as strong as a horse and younger than you are. Besides, I was only amusing myself, like the king in his counting-house, counting out my money."

He rubbed his eyes, yawned, and stretched himself contentedly in his chair.

"Usher kept me a long time," he continued, "telling me one of his interminable yarns — *à dormir debout*, as the French say."

"I can't think how you stand him," said Sylvester.

"Oh, you can stand a devil of a lot if you try," said the old man, laughing. "Have some whisky before you go?"

But Syl pleaded urgency, went out for hat

and coat, and returned ready for departure. His father accompanied him to the front door.

"By the way, Syl," he said, "do you really think so hardly of the woman who sins, or was it only that Usher made you contradictious?"

"I think a woman must be pure and chaste. If she falls, she falls for ever. Why do you ask?"

"I only wanted to know if you were genuine."

"It is the most sacred of my convictions," said Sylvester, gravely.

The two men shook hands, and the door closed behind Sylvester. The father listened to his quick footsteps crunching the gravel until the sound died away. Then he turned and sighed.

"My poor lad, God help you," he said.

CHAPTER III

SYLVESTER CONSULTS THE STARS

SYLVESTER walked home from his case, along the undulating high-road patched with moonlight and shadow, swinging his stick. The night was crisp with a touch of frost, and the air smelt sweet. Now and then a working-man regaining his home after town conviviali-ties, passed him by with a salute to which he replied with a cheerier good-night than usual. One he stopped, and discoursed with him at length on family ailments, much to the man's surprise; for Sylvester was renowned far and wide for his shy silence as well as for his skill. Once he began to whistle an air, wofully out of tune, and then broke into a short laugh.

Yes, Ella was right. It was good to be alive, to feel heart and brain and body on the alert, responsive to outer things. But whence had come the change? It was years since he had felt so young and conscious of power. Was it the touch of a girl's fresh cheek against his

lips? He did not know. The feelings that had prompted the act were too new, too undefined, for immediate analysis. The spell of the benumbing heartache that had held him nerveless for four long years seemed to be broken, and he was a man again.

He looked upward at the stars in the simple fancy that the dear dead wife, the Constance he had worshipped so passionately, was gazing down upon him with happy consent in her pure eyes. The love he had given her was immortal, and she knew it. It was no disloyalty to love another sweet woman on earth and to put his own broken life and his motherless child into her keeping. . . . Yet after a few moments he lowered his gaze for a while and walked on, his heart filled with the old love.

He was one of those reserved natures, capable of intense feeling, yet incapable of outward expression, who make for themselves few friends and are often condemned to loneliness of soul. Born with greater cravings for sympathy than most men, they have less power to demand it. This is too busy a world for us to stop to wonder whether a man wants what he does not ask for; too many are clamouring loudly for what we cannot give. So the unfor-

tunates are passed by unheeded, each working out in his heart his little tragedy of unfulfilled longings. But when a finer spirit comes and divines their needs, then their hearts leap towards it and cling to it with a great unexpressed passion of gratitude. Such had been the beginning of Sylvester's love for his wife; such that of his dawning love for Ella. Each in her way had comprehended his solitude; unasked in words, but spiritually besought, each had filled it with her influence. He needed the peculiar sympathy that a woman alone can give, her companionship, her practical intellect, to complement his theoretic mind. His nature cried dumbly for a whole-hearted, expansive creature to give objectivity to life. Left to himself, he sank into routine; he lacked the power of bringing colour and harmony into his world. This the woman he loved could do. Once, for a few short years, a woman had changed his universe. Then she had died, and the blackness of night had encompassed him. He had suffered silently, as a strong man suffers, rarely mentioning her name, but eating out his heart in desolation; and then Ella had come. He had known her from early childhood, but had last seen her as the schoolgirl of no account.

Now she had sprung into his horizon, a young and splendid woman of amazing opposites, who compelled attention; and she was the only woman other than Constance who, during all his life, had sought to know him and to act towards him tenderwise. Nevertheless, he could not say as yet that he loved her, in the sweet and common way of love. The old and new hung equipoised on a delicate balance. The vague sense of this, perhaps, was one element in the rare exaltation of his mood.

Another element, no doubt, was the final resolve he had taken that morning, to go to London, whither his ambitions summoned him. He was a specialist of some note in zymotic diseases. His researches had met with a recognition not confined to England. He had felt keenly that he was giving up to the small circle of a country practice what was meant for the general needs of mankind. London was the only place for study and work; for the quick amassing, too, of the small fortune that would free him from the necessity of earning daily bread and would allow him to realise his dreams of a great bacteriological laboratory, where he could devote himself exclusively to independent research.

It was at the urgent entreaty of Constance that he had bought, just before his marriage, the practice at Ayresford. A year's life there had made him regret London. A little later he had spoken of returning. She had thrown her arms about him and implored him by all his love for her to stay. She had a horror of London; why, she could not tell. It was unreasonable, but the fact remained. London would kill her, — its gloom, its hardness, its cruelty. It had been the same story whenever he had broached the subject. And then, Dorothy. The child was delicate, would pine away in the reek and fogs of the town. All her woman's armoury of passionate weapons had been employed. And he had yielded, out of his great love. Her death had set him free. But it had taken him four years to realise his freedom. The mere thought had been anguish. Now he could gaze upon the past with calmness and the future with hope. As he walked along, he began to picture the vigorous life before him. He passed from wide conception to trivial details, — the fittings of his library, domestic economies. A room for Dorothy — he pulled himself up short. He had arranged to part with her. The prospect brought a

pang. His father's comfort in the child, however, was a consolation. He thought of him tenderly, — the dear old man, the most generous and unselfish being who had ever blessed the earth. He was a man of deep reverences; his father, his dead mother, and his dead wife were enshrined in his Holy of Holies. Dorothy, then, should remain at Ayresford. Perhaps the separation would not be for long. There was a means of shortening it whose readiness was a great temptation. The vision rose before him of the child's dark curls nestling against a girl's soft shoulder. Often had he seen the reality of late, and it had disturbed his depths. Was it not his duty to give the little one so sweet and strong a mother? Again he consulted the stars.

He had reached a set of workmen's cottages in process of erection, on either side of the road, which marked the beginning of the town. The moonlight beat hard upon them, showing up vividly their windowless and doorless skeletons and the piles of bricks, mortar, and lime-covered boards at their thresholds. He had passed the first block and was about to traverse a cross-road that led to the railway station, when a dog-cart containing two men and some lug-

gage turned out of it sharply on to the highway. Before he could realise the fact, the vehicle suddenly lurched, the horse plunged, and in a moment the occupants were thrown heavily on to the road. Sylvester could see at once the cause of the mishap. A pail of mortar left by the roadside, either through carelessness or urchin mischief, had caught the wheel. He ran forward. One of the men, the driver, rose, and shaking himself went to the horse's head, which was turned round in calm inquiry. The other man lay still.

"Hurt?" cried Sylvester.

"No, doctor," replied the driver, who belonged to the George Hotel of Ayresford. "The gentleman may be."

He left the pacific animal, and bent with Sylvester over the prostrate form.

It was that of a handsome, full-blooded man in the prime of life. He had fair hair and a great moustache. His face gleamed very white beneath the moon, and his eyes were glassy. The driver supported his head, while Sylvester straightened the inert body, which had remained huddled together after the fall, wrapped in a disordered Inverness cape. Apparently no bones were broken. Sylvester felt

his pulse, which was just perceptible. Then suddenly he viewed the man's face full, and started back in amazed distress.

"Good heavens! it's Frank Leroux!"

"That's the gentleman's name, sir," said the driver.

"How do you know?"

"He telegraphed from London for a bed to-night, saying that he was to be met by the last train, which I just did, sir."

"But he's my oldest friend," exclaimed Sylvester. "Leave him to me and see if the trap is all right. Bring the cushions for his head."

He pursued his investigations. Leroux was alive. A trickle of blood damped his hair. After a while Sylvester drew an anxious breath. It was a severe concussion; how grave he could not for the moment estimate. To drive him in the narrow two-wheeled cart was out of the question. He hailed the driver, who had righted the vehicle.

"Get an ambulance as quick as you can from the Infirmary. That's nearest."

The man touched his hat, and mounting drove off at a forced speed. Sylvester remained by Leroux, and, having done all that was mo-

mentarily possible, was at last able to reflect upon the entire unexpectedness of his presence. They were old friends, had been at school and at Guy's together. Leroux, who was somewhat of a waif in the world, had spent many holidays here in Ayresford, at Woodlands. And even after he had thrown over medicine for painting, they had maintained the old relations. Sylvester had reckoned upon him being best man at his wedding; and when for some whimsical reason, which Sylvester could never discover but attributed to the artistic temperament, he declined and went off to Norway, the bridegroom elect knew no one intimately enough to appoint in his stead save Roderick Usher, against whom he had a constitutional antipathy. Although he had seen little of him during his married life, owing to his confinement in the country, and had heard little of him of late years, save that he was abroad, Sylvester still entertained for him the warmest affection. How, therefore, was he to explain this sudden unannounced appearance in Ayresford? It was preposterous that Frank Leroux should put up at the George Hotel; as preposterous as if he himself, in earlier days, had driven there instead of to Woodlands. The act was a sort

of treason against friendship, and Sylvester felt absurdly hurt. He wished that Leroux would straightway recover consciousness and health so that he could rate him soundly for his unfriendliness. But there the man, with all the mystery of motive locked in the dull brain, lay helpless and inert, amid the builder's refuse from the fantastic shells of houses hard by. It was an ironical way for friends to meet after an absence and a silence of years.

Some stragglers from the station came up, passengers by the train, one or two porters, and the postman with the bag of local mails, and offered assistance. Sylvester declined, explaining briefly. Not daring to proffer suggestions as to the patient's treatment, they cursed in honest terms the offending pail and the worthless hands that had moved it, and loitered around. Dramatic incidents of a public kind are rare in Ayresford, and each man determined to make the most of this one, conscious, perhaps, of a lurking regret that he had not seen the accident.

Soon the dog-cart returned, bringing the ambulance and a couple of bearers from the Infirmary. Leroux was lifted on to the stretcher and covered with a blanket. The bearers

started, the muffled form between them giving a ghastly suggestion of death in life; Sylvester walked by the side, the stragglers followed, and the trap brought up the rear.

"To my house," said Sylvester.

The melancholy procession went on its way through the outskirts of the little town. The cottages gave place to villas, then came houses standing on their own grounds. Opposite the front gates of Woodlands was the doctor's house. Sylvester dismissed his followers at the gate and, taking Leroux's portmanteau from the trap, opened the door for the bearers and their burden, and directed their way upstairs. The old housekeeper, roused by the tramping, met them on the landing.

"It's a man hurt," explained Sylvester. "Frank Leroux. We'll put him in my room."

A short while afterwards, the unconscious man was settled in Sylvester's bed, a fire lighted, and Sylvester was left alone. Able to make a more minute diagnosis, he grew very grave and prepared for an all-night sitting.

In the morning Leroux was still unconscious. Sylvester sent for a trained nurse, and

as soon as she arrived and had received her instructions, he went over to Woodlands. The family were at breakfast. Miss Lanyon, a faded elderly woman, her lean shoulders enveloped in a black shawl, paused in the act of pouring out tea, tea-pot in hand.

"Oh, Sylvester, what a dreadful thing! We have just heard. How is he?"

He briefly described the accident and hinted at the result, which might be fatal. Everything depended upon treatment and nursing. He had been up all night.

"How tired you must be!" said Ella.

A world of tenderness underlay the commonplace words. Sylvester looked at her gratefully. She was deliciously fresh and sweet in her simple morning dress, and again Sylvester felt how gracious a thing was life,—especially after his night's battle with death. They talked of Leroux. All were deeply shocked by the news, for he had been a universal favourite. In the days past Ella had been accused of a schoolgirl flirtation with him. Miss Lanyon used to save up especial household goodies for his consumption during the holidays. Matthew, always fond of youth, had loved the boy's frank nature, and in his

generous way had seldom let him leave the house without a five-pound note, or a watch, or a silver-mounted walking-stick in his possession. And now the prodigal had returned in this dismaying and tragic fashion.

"What I can't understand," said Sylvester, "is why he did not announce his coming,— why he should suddenly turn up at that ungodly hour. There are plenty of day trains."

He appealed unconsciously to his father, who made no reply. But a little later, when Miss Lanyon and Ella had left the room, Matthew said, suddenly breaking a short silence,—

"I was expecting him."

"Why did n't you tell me?" asked Sylvester, involuntarily.

"He was in some trouble apparently, and asked to see me alone this morning on business."

"I wonder what it could have been?"

"I wonder," said the old man, drily.

Sylvester flushed, as if at a rebuke. Knowing his father, he was aware of indiscretion. Matthew had always maintained the most impenetrable reserve as regards his business

affairs; the son had been trained from childhood to look upon them as sacrosanct, and to question was an indecency.

"I beg your pardon, father," he said deferentially.

"I mentioned the fact, for obvious reasons," said Matthew.

"Quite so," said Sylvester, and then hesitating and finally blurting it out, as if he were ashamed of it, he added, —

"I know you are a father confessor to every poor devil in trouble."

The old man looked at his son and his kind eyes grew a little moist. Any tribute of faith and love from Sylvester touched him deeply. But he laughed and said characteristically, —

"There are some people who 'll tell you anything, if you 're only soft-headed enough to listen to them." Then he nodded towards the window, and waved his hand, —

"There is one, anyhow, who does n't want a confessor."

It was Ella, standing in the clear March sunshine of the garden, looking in through the French window, and holding up a bunch of fresh-gathered violets. With a word of adieu to his father, Sylvester went out and joined

her. She pinned the flowers in his button-hole and for ten pleasant minutes they walked along the trim-kept paths.

"You were not angry with me last night?" he asked.

She murmured very meekly, —

"If I were, I should not be here with you now."

"I never thought I should — ever do such a thing again," he said awkwardly. "I could n't help it. It has made a different man of me."

She drew herself up quite proudly and looked him straight in the eyes. They were brave, clear eyes, and so were the man's that met them.

"Are you in earnest?" she asked.

"Am I the man not to be in earnest?" he answered.

The doctor's page, running across the strip of lawn to them, broke the spell with the time-honoured morning announcement, —

"There is some one in the surgery, sir."

Sylvester dismissed the urchin and looked at his watch. It was some minutes past his consultation hour.

"We will have a long talk this evening," he said, bidding her farewell.

CHAPTER IV

LEROUX SPEAKS

MATTHEW and Miss Lanyon were standing under the front porch talking over poor Frank Leroux when Ella came up with a very happy face.

"What a colour you've got, child!" cried Agatha Lanyon.

"It is the fresh country air. I was being choked in town."

"And the country people," suggested the elder lady, archly.

"And the fresh country people," assented Ella.

"My dear," said Matthew to his sister, "this is the first time we've been complimented on our adorable rusticity."

"We don't count," said Miss Lanyon.

"I never knew you could be so wicked," cried Ella, taking her by her shoulders and kissing her. Whereupon she disappeared into the house.

"I do hope it is settled," said Miss Lanyon, with a little sentimental sigh.

"What?"

"Sylvester and Ella. Do you mean to say you have n't noticed? I have been following it all for months."

Miss Lanyon had reached the age when one lives in the romances of others.

"I believe you amuse yourself, Agatha, by mixing up your young friends and sorting them out in pairs, like gloves," remarked Matthew.

Miss Lanyon denied the charge indignantly. This was quite a different matter. Anybody with eyes could see how things were tending. It was a match. She was sure it was a marriage made in heaven.

"I like heaven-made marriages as little as machine-made boots," said Matthew. "Both are apt to come undone in unexpected places. But if these two are thinking of a wholesome earth-made union—well, I shall be delighted."

"But has n't Syl told you anything?"

"Not a word."

"Could n't you ask him, Matthew?"

"My dear Agatha," said he, drawing himself up, "how can you suggest my committing such an impertinence?"

Miss Lanyon worshipped her brother, but she felt there were many odd corners of his mind which needed the housewifely besom; just as there were cobwebs in his office which, on the rare occasions when she entered it, made her fingers twitch. But being organically acquiescent she sighed again sentimentally, and brought Matthew his hat and stick.

For Ella, the hours of that day were winged with sunshine. She loved Sylvester as deeply as one of our untried, pure-minded Northern girls can love; and with larger wisdom, too, than most. For she had lived a free life in her aunt's eccentric house in London, and had sifted the vanities of many men. Passion would only be evoked by the clasp of encircling arms and would rise to meet claiming lips. As yet in Ella it lay a pure fire hidden in the depths of a fervent nature. But all the sweet thrills of a woman's early love were hers,—the pride in a strong man's wooing, the fluttering fears as to her sufficiency for his happiness, the resolves, scarce formulated, to raise herself to his level, the dim dreams of a noble life together, striving for the great things of the world that are worth the winning. Added thereto was the delicate charm, essentially femi-

nine, of triumph over the shadows that had fought with her for possession of his heart.

When she entered her room to dress for dinner that evening, she took down her frocks and laid them on the bed, and stood a while in deep thought. She must look her best to-night. She chose a simple cream dress with chiffon round the bodice and sleeves. Halfway through her toilette she clasped her white arms over her neck, and looking in the glass held long converse with her image. It seemed so strange that she, with all her imperfections of soul and body, should be chosen to guide a man's destiny. Then lighter fancies prevailed, and she spent anxious moments in arranging her thick auburn hair. When she came down at last, with a diamond-hilted dagger thrust through the coils, and a bunch of violets peeping shyly from the chiffon in her corsage, Matthew paid her an old man's compliment.

"Do I look nice?" she asked, gratified. "I'm glad; for you once told me that you liked me in this frock."

There are times when the sincerest of women can be most blandly deceitful.

A general practitioner may propose to him-

self many pleasant occupations for his spare hours, but his patients dispose of them effectually. On this particular day, when Sylvester craved leisure to watch over Leroux and to open his heart finally to Ella, impossible people fell sick at interminable distances, tiny human beings came with preposterous haste into this world of trouble, and larger ones gave sudden and alarming symptoms of leaving it. It was one of those well-known days of sudden stress when a country doctor eats his meals standing and wearing his overcoat. Finally, an evening visit from which he reckoned on being free by nine kept him by an anxious bedside till nearly eleven. But he had found time to despatch to Ella a few lines scribbled on a leaf of his pocket-book : —

DEAREST, — I can't come, much as I long to. Will see you in the morning. S. L.

This was almost the first letter he had ever written to her; certainly the first love-letter. The new sweetness of it soothed Ella's disappointment.

At half-past eleven he reached his house, a very weary man. He put on his slippers, stretched himself, yawned, and thought wist-

fully of bed. But first he must go to Leroux, whom he had only seen at odd intervals during the day. He was pouring himself out some whisky when the housekeeper entered the dining-room, smoothing her apron.

"I'm glad you've come, Mr. Sylvester. He's took worse, nurse says. His temperature has gone up to 104."

He nodded, swallowed the drink, and went upstairs. The nurse was bending over the bed in the dimly lit room, adjusting the ice-bag. The sick man's portmanteau had been unpacked, and the contents were piled upon a chest of drawers. The clothes he had been wearing were hanging from a row of pegs against the door. The flap of the jacket turned outward, revealed in the breast-pocket a letter-case stuffed with papers. With the air of a man accustomed to prompt action, Sylvester withdrew the letter-case and locked it up. The nurse confirmed the housekeeper's statements.

"He has been delirious at times," she added.

Sylvester bent down and placed the thermometer in position, then waited, looking gravely down upon his friend. Leroux's face was congested. His hands moved feebly.

Now and then he moaned. Sylvester examined him closely, inspected the temperature chart of the last few hours, questioned the nurse as to their history. A surmise that had been troubling him most of the day now converted itself into a certainty. Leroux must have been drinking heavily of late. Thus it was that meningitis had set in from the concussion. But why should Leroux, once the sanest and cleanest of men, have taken to drink? The pity of it smote Sylvester. The gay spirit brutalised, the noble mind o'erthrown. His heart yearned over the unconscious man. His father had spoken of Leroux being in trouble. He conjectured pitiful histories of downfall. With a sigh he turned away, gave final directions, and went to bed.

Three hours later he was waked. The nurse outside the door was calling him. Accustomed to sudden rising, he leaped up, and thrusting on dressing-gown and slippers, went back to the sick room. Leroux was in full tide of violent delirium, his words, wonderfully articulate, striking almost spectrally upon the utter silence of the house, —

"It is better to die than to live in hell on earth. . . . If you give me up, God Almighty

will give me up. . . . What is his love to mine?"

The nurse, who had been on duty since ter, was young and nervous.

"He has been like this for an hour. I could n't stand it any longer."

"We will go away to the south," continued Leroux. "No one minds what a painter does — For God's sake don't give me up —"

"You can go to bed, nurse," said Sylvester. "I 'll sit with him."

The tired girl, glad to gain some extra and unexpected hours of slumber, retired gratefully. Sylvester sat by the bedside. It was as well, he thought, that the man's poor secrets should be blabbed into a friend's ears instead of a stranger's. He tried not to listen, but to think of other things, — Ella and his meeting with her on the morrow. But the clear voice, now rising in ghastly emphasis, now sinking to a murmur losing itself in guttural incoherence, continued its tale of love and despair, so that Sylvester could not choose but piece it together in his mind. It was a common tale of unlawful love: a passionate man, a yielding woman, a deceived and adoring husband. Sylvester, whose reserved, chaste nature had caused him

to train himself in a narrow groove of orthodox morality, felt strangely repelled by the confession. He had always regarded Leroux as the soul of honour. The thief of a man's wife was lowered in his esteem.

There was a silence. He rested his head on his hand and wearily dozed. Suddenly came a cry from the bed, a cry of great pain and longing, —

"Constance — Constance!"

The name, fitting in with a waking dream, brought Sylvester with a leap to his feet, and he looked in foolish bewilderment at Leroux. The latter murmured incoherently. Had he dreamed the voice crying out the name so distinctly? He held his breath, trying to seize the half-formed syllables.

"Constance — my love —"

It had come again. He had not been dreaming. The voice rose once more, and each word came sharply cut from the sick man's lips.

"*Sylvester will never know.*"

Then the tremendous horror of the revelation crashed down upon the man, stunning his brain, paralysing his limbs. The great drops of sweat stood on his forehead, and his eyes

were staring. And Leroux, who had struck upon a quieter vein of reminiscence, babbled on of the happy days of his love.

The first thunder-clap had passed. Thought began to return. Sylvester sank into a chair and stared at the ground. The once clear vision of the past was distorted into a phantasmagoria of leering shapes. He shivered as with an ague, rubbed his eyes, and looked sharply at the man on the bed. Which of the two was delirious? Leroux raved of death and despair. The involuntary confession was too complete; mistake was impossible. Yet the other was impossible. Constance guilty of this hideousness? Her life a lie? The firm anchorage of his soul but shifting sand? He had worshipped her as more than woman, — as the purest, chastest thing that God had ever given to man for his guidance. It was a ghastly figment of Leroux's drink-besotted brain.

He rose, went to the drawer in which he had locked Leroux's letter-case, and taking it out with shaking hands, deliberately turned the contents on to the corner of the chest. In spite of the revulsion of faith he had a sickening certainty of finding there what he hoped he would not find.

There it was, staring him in the face amid a heap of stamps, visiting cards, pencilled memoranda slips, letters, and law papers: a soiled, crumpled letter in his dead wife's hand. He took it up, and from it dropped a lock of fair hair, — her hair. He read it through steadily. It was a letter of passionate love, leaving no doubt as to guilt; of despair, almost madness; such a letter of abandonment as a woman writes but to one man in a lifetime. It bore no date save the day of the week, — Wednesday. Even in his agony he contrasted the difference between this woman and the serene, methodical wife who would as soon have left a letter undated as the household dinner unordered. He threw the letter and the lock of hair into the fire, and watched the two little flames in the glowing coals. The paper curled, the hair writhed; then a little light ash remained.

Methodically he replaced the cards and papers in the letter-case and locked it up again in the drawer. Then he stood at the foot of the bed and watched the man who had done him this great wrong, his brain on fire with bewildering fury. The name of his wife came again from the man's lips. A red cloud passed before Sylvester's eyes. For a moment he

seemed to lose consciousness of manhood, to become a wild beast. When he recovered, he found himself glaring into Leroux's eyes with his fingers at his throat. How near he had been to murder he did not know.

He drew himself up and wiped the sweat from his forehead, shaken to the depths by the beast impulse. The reaction brought self-control. He resumed his vigil by the bedside, listening grimly to the words of Leroux, now less frequent and distinct. Yet though he could master his actions, he did not combat with the increasing hatred that took the place of the old affection. At times he considered calmly whether such a man should be allowed to live. In his weak state one quick blow over the heart would stop its beating for ever. The man had done more than wrong him. He had killed his soul, made it an awful thing to live. Yet, as if in contempt of such imaginings, he rose once or twice and changed the bandages with a surgeon's delicate handling, and moistened the swollen lips with ice.

Gradually all the phases of realisation developed themselves in his mind. Far off memories recurred, touched the flesh. It was their marriage bed whereon Leroux was lying.

He shuddered from the manifold horror of it, and for the first time broke into a hoarse cry.

Toward morning the fever lowered and Leroux lay still. Streaks of a ghostly daylight crept in through the Venetian blinds and barred the floor. The nurse came to take over her watch. Sylvester gave brief instructions, and, going to his room, threw himself on his bed and slept heavily. At the moment of waking he had a sense of nightmare, was all but congratulating himself on his release; but another instant brought the full flood of memory. He rose, shaved, dressed himself as usual, and went down to breakfast. At the bottom of the stairs was a quick patter of feet and two little arms were thrown around his limbs. It was Dorothy. He started back, looked at her stupidly. Then roughly disengaging her, he thrust her aside and hurried into the breakfast room. A new and sickening doubt convulsed him. Was she his child?

She came in a while later, shyly holding by the maid-servant's skirts, regarding him with scared reproach. Never had her father been cross or rough. Ungentleness from him was incomprehensible to her child's mind.

"Run away upstairs," he said, controlling

his voice, then added to the servant, "Take Miss Dorothy into the nursery."

The child burst into tears, as the maid led her out. Tender-hearted a man as he was, for all the world he could not have called her back.

CHAPTER V

DE MORTUIS

He received his patients in the consulting-room, visited Leroux, and went on his morning rounds. On his return, he perceived Ella at the gates of Woodlands. He raised his hat and was proceeding to turn into his own little carriage drive, when she made a gesture of arrest. He pulled up, descended from the trap, and went to meet her.

"How is poor Mr. Leroux? we have all been so anxious. Of course the nurse has reported, but we wanted to know from you."

"I am afraid it's a serious matter," said Sylvester.

"Do you mean that he may die?"

"Possibly."

"I am so sorry," she said, laying a sympathetic touch on his arm. "I know what a dear friend he was."

"A dear friend," he assented grimly.

"You are looking so fagged. You have been sitting up all night, I hear. Two nights."

He confessed his vigils, explained Leroux's symptoms, and gave her an authoritative report for his father. If he found any material change since the morning, he would send a message across. The topic exhausted, there was a short silence. She tried to speak, after an embarrassed glance, but his sombreness daunted her. He was taking this danger of his friend greatly to heart.

"You are coming in to see Uncle Matthew some time to-day?" she asked.

"It depends upon my work," he said. "I have a great deal to occupy me."

With a word of adieu he left her and went into his own house. Ella passed through the gate of Woodlands and strolled slowly down the shrubbery walk, carrying a little burden of depression. For all his anxiety on Mr. Leroux's behalf, he might have made some reference to his letter, some allusion to the sweet and delicate suspense of their present relations. She felt vaguely disappointed at the lack of appeal to her sympathy. But her spirits revived when Matthew Lanyon, coming briskly home to lunch, overtook her and

asked her in his cheery voice for news of the invalid. She took his arm in girlish fashion and gave him Sylvester's message.

"He seems dreadfully distressed," she said.

"Poor old Syl! But he'll pull him through. He doesn't realise his own powers. I don't think we respect Syl half enough. He's a great physician, you know."

He rattled on, proud of his son, quite glad to have a pretty girl hanging, in that daughterly way, on his arm. He stopped now and then, pointing to the tiny green shoots on the trees. The fine weather of the last few days was the cause. Did Ella remember how black everything was only a week ago? He spoke as if it were a miracle performed for the first time and not the recurring phenomenon of a million springs. A thrush flew out of a laurel bush. He named it, followed it with his eyes to the elm where it alighted, stooped down and picked a snail from the middle of the gravel, where it might get crushed, and threw it lightly on the grass. The tender simplicities of the old man touched the girl deeply that afternoon, and his steady optimism made her feel ashamed of her misgivings. So the sunshine came into her heart again.

But two days passed before they saw Sylvester. News came frequently. Leroux was sinking. At last Sylvester entered the library at the hour of tea and announced gravely, —

"He is dead."

Miss Lanyon uttered a little cry, and tears flooded her eyes. Matthew held out his hand.

"I 'm sorry, Syl."

"He died about half an hour ago," said Sylvester. "He never recovered consciousness, so what were his last wishes God alone knows. I have put all his papers into a sealed envelope, which I had better hand over to you, father."

Matthew took the packet in silence and locked it in a drawer of his writing-table.

"You had better let me look after the funeral too, Syl," said he, kindly. "It 's the first chance I 've had of doing anything for the poor fellow."

"Thank you, father," said Sylvester.

Miss Lanyon tearfully enumerated Leroux's virtues. What a frank, open-hearted, generous lad! And to be taken away, like this, in his prime! Who could fathom the will of God? Ella remained silent, grieved at

Sylvester's loss. But he refused to meet the ready sympathy in her eyes, and looked stonily through the window on the grey March sky. Presently he turned away. To remain there longer was unendurable.

"I have a patient to see, some way out. One must n't neglect the living for the dead."

Then for the first time he met Ella's glance, and a special application of his saying occurred to him.

"Good-bye, all," he said, and strode hurriedly from the room. He drew a deep breath on reaching the open air. It was good to be alone, away from the torturing irony of sympathy. And it was good to be away from the foreshadowing of reproach in a woman's eyes.

That night, before he slept, he shut his teeth upon a horrible repulsion, and went into the death chamber to see that all things had been decently done. The man lay cold and pale, his jaws swathed and his eyes closed, an awful sphinx. Sylvester stood and gazed upon him till his heart grew as cold as the dead man's. It was well that he was dead, so that he could blab the disastrous secret no more. Sylvester had questioned the nurses dis-

creetly. To his relief he had found that the delirious ravings had made no impression on their memories. He alone had been the confidant. He had tended the man with devoted skill. The strain of that terrible task was over. Now the dead past would bury its dead, — his own heart and youth therewith. He was glad the man would no longer cumber the earth — and he was glad that his wife was dead.

Three days afterwards, Leroux was buried. A fussy elderly man, Leroux's cousin and sole surviving relative, shared with Sylvester the post of chief mourner, and departed into the unknown whence he came. Sylvester stood by the grave with a set, impassive face, and his father stood by his side, looking strangely like him. On the drive home it was Sylvester who exchanged a few courteous remarks with the cousin; but the old man remained singularly silent.

They sat together alone that evening in the library.

"Leroux died intestate," said Matthew, breaking a long silence. "He was in a troubled state of mind and was coming to me to help him with his will."

"He had been drinking heavily," said Sylvester.

"I presumed so. He had roughed the will out. He only had a few thousands. But Dorothy was to have the greater part. I showed the draft to John Leroux to-day, who is a man of great wealth. He is desirous that his cousin's wishes should be carried out."

"I can accept no gifts from Mr. John Leroux," said Sylvester.

The old man argued the point. Morally the money was Dorothy's. Sylvester listened stubbornly. He revolted at the thought of touching Leroux's money. It was a ghastly impossibility. He repeated, —

"I cannot accept it."

"Money is money, Syl, after all; and I may not be able, perhaps, to do what I had hoped for Dorothy."

"While my daughter bears my name I can support her decently. If Mr. Leroux will not benefit by what is legally his, he can devote it to charity. It is a matter of principle."

They were both inflexible men, and they understood each other's nature. Matthew did not press the point.

"Very well," he said in a business tone. "I will tell Mr. Leroux of your decision."

But the impassiveness of his tone was belied by the almost yearning earnestness with which he regarded his son, who sat staring into the fire. He would have given years of his own happiness to know whether a gnawing suspicion were baseless; but the question could not be put. Sylvester was silent. What troubles were at work behind his sombre brow the old man could not fathom; and Sylvester, though his heart was bursting, could not speak.

How could he disclose, even to the being who now was dearest to him in the world, his wife's shame, his own dishonour? Better to keep the hideous fact locked up in his breast. But yet, if he could have found a rush of tumultuous words, what heart-ease were in it! So many, with that great gift of expansiveness, had come to his father and gone away comforted, and he, the son deeply loving and deeply loved, was powerless to utter a complaint. He bit his lip to repress a groan.

And so it was all through the remainder of his residence in Ayresford. His relations with his father continued their old undemonstrative course. To please him, he assumed

his wonted cheerfulness and spoke of matters political and parochial. And by degrees the old man forgot the cloud he had seen hanging over him and only thought of his approaching departure. Dorothy came to live at Woodlands, so as to grow accustomed to the change, said Sylvester, and he only saw her on his rare visits. He forced himself to be kind and take notice of her as formerly. But the sight of her was a great pain.

Ella he avoided as much as possible, never seeing her alone. One day she was standing by the porch as he came up.

"Is my father in?" he asked.

"He has n't yet come back from the office."

"I will go and meet him there," he replied, and went away forthwith.

"Have you and Syl quarrelled?" asked Miss Lanyon, who had observed the scene from indoors.

Ella laughed; not a happy laugh.

"You are behind the times, Aunt Agatha. Nowadays unceremoniousness is a proof of friendship."

"I should call it rudeness, my dear," said Miss Lanyon.

"That 's a proof of affection," said Ella.

But she went quickly up to her room, lest the elder lady should see the angry tears that rose in her eyes.

At first she strove to explain away his change of attitude. Then she examined her own conduct, with a view to discover therein some possible cause. She could find none. A dull sense of pain and dread crept over her. What did it mean? He had kissed her, all but asked her to be his wife, and now, suddenly, he ignored her existence. The realisation of the fulness of her love for him smote her cruelly as she lay awake at night. She shrank, fearful-eyed, from the prospect of life without him. It stretched before her a dreary waste of futile years. Then the quick hope of youth came back. It was some foolish misunderstanding. Sylvester was worried, preoccupied, saddened. There were so many things to be reckoned with in the strenuous life of a man. He would speak, explain. All would be well.

But the days passed and that of Sylvester's departure drew nigh. He had hurried it on. His successor had arrived, been introduced to the practice; no advantage could be gained by remaining at Ayresford, where all save his father was strangely hateful. Ella waited, but

Sylvester never spoke nor looked her way. At last she could bear the mortifying suspense no longer. It was the evening before his departure. She was sitting with Miss Lanyon in the drawing-room after dinner, having left the two men below to their coffee and cigars. Her companion was silently knitting, her eyes somewhat dim, poor soul, at the prospect of Sylvester's absence. Ella went to the piano and tried to play, but her heart was not in the music. The men lingered downstairs. An hour passed. The silence and the aching of her own suspense acted on her nerves. Suddenly she left the room and went downstairs and opened the dining-room door. Both men rose as she stood on the threshold, a graceful figure, with heightened colour and eyes unusually bright.

"I want to say something to Syl before he goes," she announced boldly.

"Here he is," said Matthew, coming forward. "I was just going into the library for a little as you came in. No, really, Syl, I was. I 'll join you upstairs when you have had your chat."

"You spoil me, Uncle Matthew," said the girl, touched, as she always was, by his old-

fashioned courtesy. "Why can't Syl and I go into the library?"

"Because I'm master in my own house, my dear," smiled the old man.

He closed the door behind him. Sylvester motioned Ella to a chair.

"No," she said. "I have not come to stay."

She was silent for a moment, looking at the tip of her slipper that rested on the fender.

"Have I done anything to offend you lately, Sylvester?" she asked at length.

"Nothing that I am aware of," he answered gravely.

"We don't seem to be such good friends," she hazarded.

"I am sure you must be mistaken."

The cold formality of the phrase was a knell to her hopes. She looked up somewhat piteously and met hard, unsympathetic eyes.

"I thought — you made me think —" she began. He raised his hand slightly to check her.

"If I did," he said coldly, "I was wrong. I owe you all my apologies." There was a moment's silence. "If I could say more, I would," he added.

But a quickly gathering anger in the girl's heart suddenly broke out. She drew herself up, flaming-cheeked, with eyes flashing through the tears that would come.

"You have behaved horribly, cruelly, and I want never to see your face again."

Sylvester bowed his head. A swift rustle of skirts, a sound of the door, and she was gone. He raised his head and drew rather a choking breath. He knew that Ella had just cause for reproach. But what could be done? The new budding love had been killed outright. He regarded her with aversion, with something akin even to horror. And his heart was as cold as a stone.

CHAPTER VI

THE WALDEN ART COLONY

It was a Sunday in June, a year after Sylvester had come to London, and the great stretch of the Park, past Stanhope Gate, north of Achilles' statue, was thronged. The warm breath of the afternoon air scarcely stirred the leaves that chequered with shade and sunshine the mass of cool colour below. Above shone the vivid green of the foliage and the sea-blue of the sky; but beneath the branches the air was tempered by the reflection of the whites, the pale greys, the delicate blues and lavenders, and the soft pinks of dresses and parasols. It was the ordinary crowd that sat there, very fashionable, somewhat vulgar below the surface, but delicately picturesque, like human flower-beds in a sweet but formal garden. And on the walks beside and around and between passed the endless procession of loungers. The hum of talk, the subdued patter of footsteps, and the frou-frou of soft drapery hung upon the air.

Sylvester sat in the sun at the edge of one of the parterres, flanked, on the one side, by an elderly matron chaperoning a line of laughing girls, and on the other by a white-moustached, red-faced Anglo-Indian laying down the law to a neighbour on the preparation of curry. Sylvester stared moodily at the parterre in front, separated from him by the pathway, and felt very lonely. Despite his loss of faith in man and woman, he hungered dumbly for the human companionship from which he shrank. The first sense of novelty over, his practice in London had failed to stimulate him. The interest was absorbing, but unthrilling. He began to realise that he was degenerating into a consulting and recording machine, — very sensitive, it is true, but a machine all the same. He lived alone in a formal house in Weymouth Street. In the morning he rose early, worked in his laboratory, saw patients, ate, saw more patients, worked again in his laboratory, ate, and till bedtime read or worked again among the endless test-tubes and retorts. And so, without change, day after day. His commonsense told him that it was not a healthy life for a human being. But how to alter it effectively save by mixing with his kind? And his

kind was hateful to him. He had grown to be a recluse, misanthropically brooding over its worthlessness. Yet now and then, as to-day, instinct drove him into the crowd.

He caught himself half envying the crowd's irresponsible gaiety. It was quite within his power, as far as external conditions were concerned, to become as one of those he saw and to surround himself with laughter-loving friends. He wondered vaguely what it would be like.

"It 's the proportion of turmeric that does it," exclaimed his neighbour, in a more emphatic tone than he had hitherto used. "The only man I knew that had the secret was poor old Jack Hilton — you remember Jack Hilton — of the Guides? He ran off with Mrs. Algy Broadbent."

Sylvester shivered slightly. A cloud came before his eyes. Were all men dishonourable and all women faithless? Was all this refined and nicely civilised crowd rotten to its soul? He looked furtively around. Who could tell what Messalina lurked beneath yonder girl's pink and white skin and innocent fresh eyes, what villainy and meanness lay concealed beneath yonder young soldier's specious bearing

of manliness? Disgust banished the haunting envy.

A man who had been chattering to the girls on his left took leave of them with a great sweep of his hat. In the act of passing Sylvester, he stopped short and regarded him as though in astonishment.

"*Trône de l'air!* and by all the oaths of the vehement South, what are you doing here?"

"How do you do, Roderick?" said Sylvester, rising and formally shaking hands.

"Oh, I 'm bursting with fatness, which is more than I can say for you. But what are you doing in this galley?"

"Why should n't I be here?"

"The eternal fitness of things. One does n't as a general rule, for instance, meet the Archbishop of Canterbury at a Covent Garden ball."

He spoke in a hearty voice, with somewhat exotic gestures. Roderick Usher had spent part of his schooldays in France, and was fond of insisting on his cosmopolitan training. He was dressed in the most perfectly fitting of frock-coats and patent leather boots, and wore faultless grey suède gloves. His only departure from the commonplace severity of fashion-

able attire was a yellow Indian silk bow whose ends spread over the front of his coat. He had light fuzzy hair that protruded bushily behind his glossy silk hat, and his yellow beard was pointed in the Vandyke pattern. He was of medium height, rather stout; his face was broad and ruddy, at first sight giving the impression of frank good humour; but his eyes, small and somewhat shifty, although hidden behind gold pince-nez, detracted from the general air of handsomeness that he was pleased to cultivate. Besides, the deep lines of nearing middle age were growing troublesomely obvious.

Sylvester replied in a matter-of-fact way to his last remark, —

"I was working in my laboratory all the morning, and I felt the need of air. Weymouth Street is not far. I don't come here as a rule."

"Bless you, my friend, there 's no need to apologise. The place belongs to you just as much as it does to me. How's the old man?"

"Which old man?" asked Sylvester.

"Your old man, my old man, both our old men. Our antique but venerated Damon and Pythias."

"My father is very well," replied Sylvester, stiffly, "and so, I believe, is yours."

"*A la bonne heure!* So you 've come to London to make your fortune? You steady scientific files always do. We poor artistic devils generally manage to make other people's."

"I don't quite understand," said Sylvester.

The other laughed and drawing a cigarette from a silver case lit it daintily.

"I don't suppose you do. You approach a paradox as solemnly as if it were a disease. We play bat and ball with it. That makes the difference between us. Have a turn?"

Sylvester assented somewhat reluctantly. He disliked the son as much as he disliked the father. But the spirit of lonesomeness had been weighing on him to-day, and human instinct craved relief. They moved away and took their places in the sauntering procession on the broad walk.

"Why don't you do more of this sort of thing?" asked Roderick. "You treat life by rule of thumb, as if it were a science. It is n't; it 's an art,—the finest of the Fine Arts. Colour, form, relief, action, sound, articulation, all combined, capable of a myriad permutations,

any one of which can be fixed by the inspiration of the moment."

"My way of life suits me best," replied Sylvester. "I teach people how to kill bacilli; you teach them how to kill time."

"Time's a deadlier enemy than all your bacilli, my friend, and takes a devilish sight more killing. But we won't argue. Argument is a discord in the symphony of existence. Besides, it's too confoundedly hot."

Here he bowed in his grand style to a passing lady acquaintance.

"Ideals can exist outside of little glass bottles, my dear Sylvester," he resumed. "Perhaps you may be surprised at hearing I am approaching the attainment of one of the ideals of my maturing years. It's a great scheme for the purification of art and the ennoblement of life. It is my own conception. Have you been to the Royal Academy yet?"

"No," said Sylvester. "I haven't had the time."

"Happy man! You have been spared a soul-rending spectacle of England's utter degradation. In all our art—drama, music, painting, poetry, architecture—it is the same. The vulgarity of commercialism, the banality of

meretricious prettiness, the hand and brain working mechanically while the soul is far away wallowing in pounds, shillings and pence, or following a golf ball, or philandering in my Lady's boudoir. The true artist is suffocated. But we 're going to change all that."

"How are you going to manage it?" asked Sylvester, with polite indifference.

"Ah, that 's my secret. A great and glorious scheme just on the point of ripening. We are going to catch our artists young, painters, musicians, poets, the whole celestial brood, and keep them out of contamination, — give them free elemental surroundings for their art to develop. They will become the teachers and the guides of the race. To carry this dream through to a reality is something to live for, — to make one feel twenty again, with all one's glittering illusions."

"You are going to carry it through?" said Sylvester.

"My boy, I should just think I am," replied Roderick, taking his arm confidentially. "Funds have been slow in coming in, but people are promising support, now that they see the magnificence of the concern. I 'll send you our prospectus and other publications.

You can judge for yourself. Perhaps your father would like to further the work."

"You'd better ask him," said Sylvester, drily. "But where does the money go to?"

"To the Colony. Didn't I tell you it was to be a colony? The Walden Art Colony. After a time it will be self-supporting; the produce will sell in the European and American markets, and the Colony will wax rich. It will become the world's great Palace of Art."

"How will this fit in with Thoreau and uncontaminated nature?"

Sylvester put the question idly. He took faint interest in Roderick's iridescent scheme, which seemed to have no bearing upon the realities of life, as he understood them. But he could not help wondering as to the mental attitude of the fools who were providing the money to launch it.

"It's too complicated to explain now," replied Roderick. "You read the literature I shall send you." He pulled out his watch. "Dear me! it is ten minutes to six, and I promised to meet Lady Milmo and Miss Defries at the quarter by the statue. They are my two most enthusiastic disciples. Shall we turn and seek them?"

"I think not," said Sylvester. "I'm too dull a dog for fashionable dames. I should be a discord in the polka, or whatever you call it, of existence."

Roderick laughed with good-humoured indulgence, showing a set of white, even teeth.

"The same old *intransigeant*," said he. "Well, go your ways. I'll convert you to the Colony yet, and make you a director! *Auf wiedersehen*!"

Sylvester shook hands with him in his glum style and strolled on towards the Marble Arch, glad to be winning homewards again away from the froth of fashion and the jargon of art. He smiled once on his way. It was at the idea of his father, shrewd-headed abhorrer of cranks, putting his hands in his pockets for the Walden Art Colony. Not while there was a lazy miscreant with wife and children in Ayresford, he thought. How could a man of the world like Roderick imagine him to be such a fool?

But Roderick, with his cheery air of confidence, followed the southward stream of people.

"How do, Usher?" said a young man, passing by.

Roderick stopped him. "My dearest boy, I have n't been able to see you to shake you by the hand. The play's immense, colossal. You 've marked a new era, — the Marlowe of our time."

"Very good of you to say so," murmured the dramatic author.

"It is my most esteemed privilege," said Roderick, and waving an adieu with his well-gloved hand, he went on his way to Lady Milmo.

At the corner he looked about for a moment, and not seeing her sat down and waited. He gazed on the soft blue sky and stroked his pointed beard, letting his thoughts wander whither they would.

"I am so sorry, Mr. Usher," said a voice. He started to his feet; Lady Milmo and Ella were before him.

"A thousand pardons. I was gathering the wool of sweet and bitter fancy! Oh, no, you are not late, indeed not. Won't you sit? It is somewhat deserted here, but it is more rural than further up; we can talk more freely."

"I am sure you can talk interestingly anywhere," said Lady Milmo.

She was a small elderly lady dressed some-

what youthfully. She wore a little rouge, a trifle of black along the eyelashes, and a coquettish straw hat with pink roses and an osprey feather. She seemed thoroughly contented with herself and her surroundings.

"One gets into the habit of talking in the key of one's environment," said Roderick, reflectively. "Don't you think so, Miss Defries?"

"It is the fault of this social life of ours," replied Ella. "There are so many affectations and insincerities around us that we are afraid to be genuine."

"It is a great charm of Lady Milmo and yourself that with you one is bound to be genuine."

"I do like people to appear just as they are," smiled Lady Milmo.

"That is what we are working for," said Roderick; "the return to sincerity and simple truth."

"Well, what have you to tell us?"

"Good news. Raynham has come round, and will take a seat on the Council. He may get a couple more Academicians. One further item in my debt of gratitude to you, Miss Defries."

"It is very little I have been able to do," said Ella. "I only asked Mr. Raynham to receive you. Your own earnestness and conviction won him over."

An old gentleman came up and spoke to Lady Milmo. Roderick politely yielded him his chair and took possession of a vacant one on the other side of Ella.

"It is your womanly sympathy and courage all through that I have to thank; your cheering in depression, your encouragement in the face of defeat. If the star of success has arisen, it is you who have dispersed the obscuring clouds. A man may set his heart on a thing, but a woman keeps it there."

He spoke in a low voice, and Ella leaned towards him to listen. Her cheeks flushed. The flattery was sweet, and there was a subtle vibration in his voice that stirred her.

"One would die if there were not something noble to live for," said she, suddenly throwing off the stealing languor. "To rise every morning and look forward to sixteen inevitable waking hours that will not bring one throb to the pulses, one inspiring hope; to go to sleep each night feeling dull and useless, and so on for endless months and years, — it is an unliv-

able life. It is you I have to thank for putting an interest in my way."

"I love to hear you speak like that," he said admiringly. "Pray God you keep your enthusiasms. There are thousands who never know the thrill. It should be part of our mission to awaken their souls. There is one friend of ours, for instance, who needs it to make him a great man. Oddly enough, I have just left him — dear old Sylvester Lanyon, you know. I found him sitting a little higher up, looking like a sick raven among birds of paradise."

Her clear girl's eyes effected feminine concealment of the old pain that every reference to Sylvester had caused her for the past year. Her heart rebelled against it, resenting the inefficacy of time to cure. Wantonly she ignored it.

"I have not set eyes on him since he settled in town. He never comes to see us. He is still mourning and moping, I suppose. The world is for the living, not the dead; don't you think so?"

"Yes. He should marry again. A woman of exuberant vitality, who would carry him along with her."

"We 'll have to find him a wife, Mr. Usher," she replied gaily.

Thus she proved to herself defiantly that all her foolish feeling for Sylvester was dead; that she had also attained a standpoint of generous forgetfulness of wrong.

"And send him out with her to doctor the Colony," laughed Roderick. "It would be the making of him. As it is, he is a man of fine honour and strong character. Even if one's own spiritual horizon is wider than that bounded by his narrow orthodoxy, yet one can but admire the steadfastness with which he keeps within its limits. I have always had, as you know, a great affection for him."

The girl's responsive nature was touched by the generous tribute. Roderick took a sudden leap in her esteem. She had her own haunting and miserable ideas as to Sylvester's honour, but the praise pleased her,—the fact of a man's loyalty to the ideal of a friend. At least, so she half consciously analysed her feelings.

The talk went on, and time passed. Lady Milmo's friend departed and mingled in the stream that began to make for Hyde Park Corner and home. She turned to Ella and Roderick.

"The dear, tiresome general has been entertaining me with his corns while I have been

dying to hear all about the Colony. And now it's too late. You must come soon and see us, Mr. Usher. It is useless to try to talk here. Why did n't we say Battersea? I 'm afraid we 're sad creatures of convention."

"Miss Defries will make an adequate report, I am sure," said Roderick. "But Raynham's accession to the cause was my main item of news."

They all rose and walked to Hyde Park Corner. There he saw the ladies into a cab and swept one of his elaborate bows as they drove off. But he remained for some moments on the curb in front of the Park gates absently watching the hansom until it was lost amid the traffic.

"I wonder," he said half aloud, "I wonder."

And he walked slowly up Piccadilly, his eyes bent on the pavement, his hands behind him, with the air of a man in deep and somewhat harassed thought.

CHAPTER VII

THE DANGEROUS HOUR

A FEW days afterwards Ella was lying on a sofa in her aunt's drawing-room in Pont Street. It was a hot afternoon, the windows were open, and the sun blinds tempered the light. Between their edges and the tops of the flowers in the window-boxes she could see a great band of golden sunshine. Having been to a late dance the evening before and to a stuffy but advanced picture exhibition in the morning, she was feeling physically languid, and glad to be excused from attendance on Lady Milmo, who was indefatigably attending a charitable committee. In her hand she held a letter that had come by the early afternoon post. It was from Matthew Lanyon, bright and gossipy on the surface, but her quick perception divined an undercurrent of sadness. He was looking forward to her promised visit in August. If only he could persuade Syl to come down too, it would be quite like old times. But perhaps

it would be better for Syl to get right away among the Swiss mountains, as he proposed. There was nothing like a complete change for a jaded Londoner. He had come down for a week-end lately and was looking fagged and overworked. The garden had never been lovelier. The rhododendrons were out and all a mass of bumble-bees; he had never seen so many in his life. He was writing late at night, on his knees in the library. Dorothy had made a complicated web of Berlin wool all over his writing-chair, by way of fitting it up as a carriage for her doll, which was throned in the midst, and of course he had not dared to disturb it.

"I think I make an average grandfather," he wrote, "but I do wish some one had given me a few lessons as to how to become a mother."

The fragrance of the country garden stole elusively upon the hot London room, and awakened a longing to get away from the glare and chatter into the cool quietude of Woodlands; to exchange the heavy dinner-party where she was due in a few hours' time, with its heavy hot-house flowers and its artificial talk, for the peaceful summer evening in

the summer-house under the trees, in the company of the dear old man, so sane, so sincere, and of Miss Lanyon, whose gentle mind seemed to have lain in lavender. She was tired; her heart was tired. The beautiful world lay hidden behind a mountain, up which she was climbing wearily, vainly. Her feet were tangled in an inextricable maze and her steps were devious. Where could she find a guide? She conjured up the picture of the old man's kind, grave smile, and longed, as only a girl can who is enmeshing her life, to throw herself down by his knees and open all her heart. Had he appeared at that moment at the door, she would have arisen and with a cry, half sob, half welcome, have thrown her arms about his neck and burst into tears.

"If only he could come!" she said, and she sank vaguely into the imagined solace. But what could she say to him? The formulated query crystallised her thoughts into chill dismay. How could she make known, even to him, the humiliation of that last interview with Sylvester, expose to him the nakedness of her outraged pride? She shrank from the thought. And the history of the year's follies? No. Never. She crumpled the letter fiercely

in her hand. Then, suddenly repenting of her violence, she smoothed the sheet tenderly and kissed it and slipped it into the bosom of her dress.

The year's follies. In this hour of lassitude and depression — rare to Ella, but common to all her sex, coming to woman with rhythmic iteration as inevitable as the tides — they rose up one by one before her, and her cheeks burned with shame. First it was Lionel Kavanagh, the poet and æsthetic critic. She had been reckless, craving excitement, forgetfulness of her burning humiliation. All through the season a year ago, she had flirted with him, openly, outrageously. He was one of Lady Milmo's menagerie, and used to sprawl on the hearth-rug and alternate rhapsody with mordant wit. And alone in her company he would sail perilously near the wind with sensuous allusiveness, until one day he grew bold and brought her a sonnet frankly sensual. She tore the manuscript into tiny pieces during an ominous silence, and ordered him out of the house. The next was Bertie Hetherington, who made violent love to her at Aix-les-Bains, whither she had been led by Lady Milmo's wandering fancy and rheumatic ten-

dencies. He was a fresh, wholesome young Briton in a Hussar regiment. The vehemence of his devotion was sweet to Ella, and she kept him hoping longer than she knew was right. Perhaps if he had possessed more brains she might have married him. But when he wrote her an impassioned letter in which he affirmed that his heart *beet* only for her, the spelling caught the humorous side of Ella's fancy and she laughed herself out of her entanglement. Yet she had wronged him, just as Sylvester had wronged her, and she had wronged herself. The fresh bloom of her maidenhood had gone. Her sensitive pride magnified the taint.

In London once more, the need of an occupation, an aim, a purpose, tormented her. She had tried the ignoble and found it bitter. She craved the higher plane of devotion to a cause, something elevated, impersonal. The ordinary pursuits that call forth a woman's self-sacrifice did not appeal to the unrest of her imagination. Besides, her young blood rebelled against self-suppression. In the stress and storm she caught at the first thing to her hand: Roderick Usher's Utopian scheme for the regeneration of art and the consequent

purification of society. She was carried away like a straw on the crest of his vehement propagandism. From an occasional attendant at her aunt's receptions, he became a regular visitor. Together they elaborated the scheme, discussed the details. She worked with him in obtaining supporters and canvassing for subscriptions. At first the correspondence, the interviewing, the plotting and intriguing, kept her enthusiastically occupied. She made converts among the young artists and poets who came to the house, inveighing against the tame formalism on the one hand and the morbid exaggeration on the other that were the curses of modern art. She attended meetings in fashionable drawing-rooms and expounded her theories. Notoriety followed her doings. A weekly paper published an illustrated interview with the priestess of the new gospel.

She believed in the scheme. It was audacious, but practical. It was impossible for convincing art to flourish in the midst of the social insincerity and commercialism of the day. The teachers of men must lead a higher life than the taught; to have authority, must dwell aloof from the world; to have inspira-

tion, must draw it from the pure wells of nature and their own hearts. These postulates being allowed, the logical consequence was the conception of a colony of earnest and devoted artists in some sequestered spot where the world's Babel came but as an echo. Such a spot was readily obtainable in California. A large ranch, in one of the loveliest valleys of the Sierra Nevada, was for sale. Extensions could be built indefinitely at a comparatively trifling cost. Thither the band of youths and maidens, uncorrupted as yet by the deadening influences around them, would proceed, and settling down would allow to flow unchecked the genuine founts of their genius. They would be in Arcadian ignorance of the arch destroyer of art, the public taste, and thus be beyond the reach of the temptation to pander to it. They would reveal the truth as it came crystallised in song or poem or picture from their own souls. The lack of pence would not disturb their serenity. Those who could afford it would pay a modest monthly contribution to the general fund. The penniless children of genius would obtain free food, shelter, and all the privileges of the Colony. The subscriptions of the supporters of the

movement in England would defray their expenses. A commission would be levied on the profits of any work produced in the Colony. This, in the course of years, when public taste was revolutionised and the Waldenites' productions obtained great prices, would place the Colony beyond the need of subscriptions or of contributions by members. It would become, in Roderick's words, "The world's great Palace of Art." Roderick himself was ready to sacrifice his future in London so as to take up the post of director of the Colony at a handsome salary.

She believed in the scheme still; success, in fact, justified her faith. But in this hour of self-abasement she distrusted the sincerity of her enthusiasm. How much had she done genuinely for the cause? How much, unconsciously, for the man? The question racked her. He had woven his influence around her life. Her name was publicly associated with his. She dreaded meeting him, yet felt the heart taken out of the day on which she was not working under his direction. Whither was she tending? She could not answer. Not where happiness would lie. To have brought herself into this morass was the last and great-

est of the year's follies. In her helpless anger she hated the scheme and all that she had done to further it. A sickening surmise as to its futility overspread her retrospect.

She clasped her hands over her hot eyes and again longed for Woodlands. Suddenly she sprang to her feet, and smoothed her dress and hair hurriedly, as if ashamed of her nervelessness. She would write to Matthew Lanyon then and there, yield herself wholly to her need of expansion, and let what would flow from her pen. She sat down resolutely at the ornamental escritoire and drew out writing materials. She had never given him any definite account of the scheme. She had alluded to it vaguely, somewhat flippantly, partly anxious to amuse and partly fearful of criticism. The mention of Roderick Usher's name had been rare. She had followed the secretive instinct of her sex. The old man's references hitherto had been jocular; deceived by her manner, he had merely regarded her interest as an idle young woman's harmless hobby. Even in this letter that she carried crumpled in her bosom, he had asked her how her artistic Robinson Crusoes were getting on. He should know the history of the whole

movement, her own hopes and fears, — perhaps more of her difficulties. She would write whatever words came into her mind.

She dipped her pen in the ink, dashed off the date and "My darling Uncle Matthew," and was starting the text of the letter, when the door opened.

"Mr. Usher, miss," announced the parlour maid.

Ella closed her blotter with a petulant snap, but rose and greeted her visitor with a smile. Roderick looked cool and point-device in a grey frock-coat suit. A slight baldness in front gave his high forehead an air of intellectuality. He had called, he informed her, just to report progress. And as he talked she sat, her chin resting on her knuckles, watching him with that wistful gaze that comes from a woman's weary uncertainties.

"There, that is all," he said in conclusion; "and I am glad there 's no more."

"Why?" asked Ella.

"Because you want a holiday, — a respite from the worry of affairs. Enthusiasms entail an expenditure of vital force; so there are times when the temperament is at a low ebb, and ought to be treated with gentle indulgence."

"Do you think I am at low ebb, Mr. Usher?"

"You are tired,—a little *mal de vivre.* Isn't it so?"

He said it so kindly that her first impulse of resentment died away.

"How do you know I 'm not simply physically out of sorts? I was dancing till four this morning and till three the morning before."

He smiled with a touch of indulgent superiority.

"As a sailor who knows the sea reads all its moods on its surface, so I read yours in your eyes. Confess. You have been feeling the burthen of life and have not known whence came its heaviness; and you have been longing for relief in the fresh, cool arms of Mother Nature."

"Perhaps," she said, looking away from him.

"You are not offended?" he said, after a pause. He had a very musical voice, trained to modulation of feelings. "My heart is always near my lips and at times speaks indiscreetly."

Ella turned round with a short laugh.

"No, I am not offended. Of course not.

But it was scarcely fair to turn me inside out like that without warning."

Immediately she regretted her confession. His acute perception had half flattered, half frightened her. She felt now that she had yielded some of her ground. She strove to regain it.

"But it's all nonsense," she added. "And very contemptible, just because it's a close day, with a stuffy dinner-party looming ahead."

"Phases of morale are never nonsense," he replied. "No one knows what unrest is better than I. We must find the remedy."

"What do you suggest?"

"Happiness."

"What is happiness?"

"The pursuit of the ideal on the wings of—"

"Of what?"

"Dare I say it—in all delicacy? Of love."

Ella again turned her face aside, uncertain whether to resent the implication or to make a light answer. Her hesitation was his opportunity.

"I, too, have been feeling depressed of late," he said. "All pleasure has in time to be paid for with pain. In a few months our scheme

will be launched, — the scheme that you and I have built up with pieces of our hearts, — and I shall go away to end my life in carrying out its working. I shall be alone. My helper and sweet comrade will no longer be by my side. Thus I, too, sigh for happiness."

He smiled sadly, but she saw that his eyes were regarding her keenly from behind his gold pince-nez.

"We won't think of that," she said hastily. "So many things may happen between then and now."

Roderick rose, rested his hand on the back of her chair, and bent over her.

"One thing might happen that would fill the months with glory, and inaugurate our project in the radiance of the rising sun. Yet not for the scheme's sake, but for our lives' sake — for the sake of the expansion and development of all that is yearning within us to find utterance — Ella — Will you come with me?"

She sat, looking straight before her, her lips apart, her body slightly swaying. Words would not come. She vaguely wished that something could happen to rid her of his presence, that he could disappear, there and

then, once for all, out of her life. Yet she felt it impossible to dismiss him. Some mysterious feminine chord had been struck whose echoes proclaimed his right to stand over her and speak to her thus.

"What are you saying?" she murmured, with an almost piteous emphasis on the last word.

"I am telling you that I love you, Ella, that my life is bound up in you, that I need you for the accomplishment of my manhood. And I am asking you to come with me to this sweet new land, to be my helper and my star. Say that you will come with me."

"Give me time," she breathed. "I can't say — I have been living in a whirl so long. I don't know what I am or think or feel. I will give you an answer some day — soon — not now."

"I will wait devotedly for your answer," said Roderick, in his courtliest manner, and moved a pace or two from her chair.

Ella looked up at him, almost grateful for his assurance.

"We will fix no period," she said. "To have to give such a reply by a definite date —"

"I do not ask it," said Roderick, quietly; though his heart was beating fast at the certainty of victory.

"You have given me the food of hope, whereon I can live meanwhile."

"Could you not bear suspense?" she asked. "I might not answer as you would like."

"I could bear anything for your sake," said he. Then, after a pause, "And now good-bye. I must have solitude to dream over my happiness."

She gave him her hand; he bent over it and kissed it, and she felt his lips hot against her skin. It gave her a little shudder of repugnance, and the feeling remained after he had gone. And yet his fascination was strong upon her. He dominated her will as no man had done before. She was conscious that he had the rare power to penetrate to the core of her woman's weaknesses, to understand her as a botanist understands a plant, and the rarer power to touch the fibres delicately, so that it became a pleasure to be weak. Again, her somewhat exaggerated conception of his wide spiritual and intellectual horizon moved her emotional temperament to wondering respect,

and she thought gratefully of the expansion of her own under his influence. With the incomplete vision wherewith the wisest of women must of necessity regard a man, she saw him strong and masterful, clearing his way resolutely to a definite end. She felt that he brought this air of mastery into his love; and he had created a need of him within her.

He held her bound by many chains. And as she stood in the drawing-room, half-consciously rubbing the spot on her hand where his lips had rested, she felt the chains grow tighter, one by one.

Her maid came into the room. "When will you dress, miss?"

She remembered the dinner-party and gave her directions. She wished that she had not to attend it. And then unbidden came the longing for "the sweet new land" with its freedom and freshness, and her cheeks flamed at the sudden realisation of what it all implied.

Her glance fell upon the blotter in which lay the just commenced letter to Matthew Lanyon. She sat down again at the escritoire and took up her pen. But the mood had passed. She found herself writing artificially, in the jargon of her set. Angrily she tore up

the paper and threw the fragments into the waste-paper basket. No; better nothing than the insincerity he despised; she loved him too dearly for that. So the letter, that was to reveal her inmost struggling self, remained unwritten.

She was very silent as Lady Milmo and herself drove to the dinner-party. Her head ached and her limbs were tired.

"The man who takes me down will over-eat himself dreadfully," she remarked, as the carriage pulled up.

"I don't think there is any danger," replied her aunt, who was a woman of experience.

And she was justified; for the girl's youth asserted itself, and as the meal progressed the headache was forgotten and Ella enjoyed herself thoroughly.

"I rather think your partner will want some supper, poor man," said Lady Milmo, on the homeward journey.

"It's his own fault; he would talk," said Ella, laughing.

Lady Milmo patted her niece's knee affectionately.

"I love to see you getting all that enjoyment out of life, my dear. You seem to take

it out in great chunks, like my neighbour this evening helping himself to iced pudding."

Ella thought of her enjoyment with a whimsical feeling of shame, a touch of disappointment at not being as jaded as she had expected. But with the quiet darkness of the night her conflict of doubts returned. After all, what trivial topics she had discussed, what inanities she had laughed at, what spiteful little shafts of malice she had flung. If she had enjoyed it, so much the worse spiritually and morally for herself. Oh, the past year! It had corrupted her. She looked back wistfully upon the girl whom Sylvester had kissed at Woodlands. That fresh, shy, sweet something she had given him then was hers no longer to give to any man. What she could give to Roderick Usher, if she yielded to him, she did not know; certainly, not that.

She was very young, very much unversed in the dark and crooked ways of life, in spite of her experience of men and things; intensely eager to keep herself pure and proud, to love the highest when she saw it. It is not to be set down to weakness, therefore, if she grew very sorry for the girl whom Sylvester had kissed, and cried herself miserably to sleep.

CHAPTER VIII

TRIUMPH

THE facilities that London offers as a hiding-place are proverbial. A man in good position may disappear entirely from his friends and yet be living for many years as a grocer's assistant half a mile away. But when two acquaintances who belong to the same social class have no particular reasons for lying hidden, they are bound sooner or later to meet. Now Sylvester and Ella had not set eyes on each other since the eve of the former's departure from Ayresford, when he had said things which Ella firmly believed at the time had broken her heart. This was not unnatural, seeing that he held rigidly aloof from the society in which Ella moved. Neither did he frequent theatres nor operas nor picture galleries, nor places of public resort. But he went this year to the Ladies' Soirée of the Royal Society, first, because he had been unable to attend the sterner masculine assembly of the former evening, and,

secondly, because he desired to meet two or three scientists of European reputation who he knew would be there.

Lady Milmo, who went everywhere and was proud of taking everywhere her beautiful niece, was at the soirée also with Ella. Their progress through the rooms was slow, as they knew many people, and the crowd was great. Suddenly Lady Milmo pulled Ella's arm.

"Dear me, if that is n't Sylvester Lanyon!"

Ella looked instinctively in the indicated direction, and as her eyes fell upon him, her heart gave a great throb. He was in earnest conversation with an elderly man who wore an order of some kind, enforcing his argument, according to a familiar trick of his, with the forefinger of one hand and the palm of the other. His brown, intellectual face and well-knit figure marked him as a man of some distinction. To Ella's dismay he appeared to her the one distinguished personality in the room. His face had grown more worn than she remembered it, and his hair greyer at the temples. She found herself pitying him.

"Come," said Lady Milmo, "I 'm going to give him a good talking to." Before Ella

could resist she had adroitly edged through the press and arrived within his reach, Ella following mechanically.

"Oh, Dr. Lanyon, fancy meeting you here. Ella and I have jars and jars of pickled rods for you. Why do you never come near us? Is it because we're so aggravatingly healthy?"

Sylvester murmured an apology. Indeed, he had no reasons to offer. Lady Milmo was an old friend. He confessed his rudeness.

"Madame," said Sylvester's companion, with a low bow.

"Professor Steinthal! I didn't know you were in London. Forgive me."

She turned to speak to him as Ella and Sylvester confronted each other. Ella put out her hand.

"I hope you are well," she said.

"Quite well; and you?"

"You ought to be able to judge."

"You seem to be in good health," he said. "What maladies may lurk beneath the surface, I cannot tell."

"I don't suppose you can," she was tempted to say. She saw that he understood, but he made no reply, and there was an awkward pause.

"I 'm going to see Uncle Matthew in August," she said at last.

"So I have heard. I 'm going to Switzerland, so I shall not have the pleasure of meeting you. Do you know many people here?"

The pointed banality of the question angered her.

"Will you never have a kind word to say to me?" she flashed out in a quick undertone, then she turned and greeted the professor effusively.

Thus, whatever wild, uncontrollable hopes were newly born at the first sight of him, they were frozen at once to death. She went home in a furious rage of humiliation. He was a man of ice and steel, an automaton equipped with an intellect, scarcely a man at all. She put an imperious end to her doubts.

Roderick Usher called next day, and spoke as one inspired with lofty ideals. Before her fascinated vision he seemed to place realities where hitherto the void had yawned or shadows at the most had shimmered. Life stretched infinitely in front of her, a lush garden, fertile with a myriad beauties. Her expanding soul

shone out of dewy eyes. All the blindness, all the weakness, all the deluded nobility of her nature, lay revealed, pathetically defenceless. It was Roderick's golden hour, when he knew that he had her at his mercy.

He rose, flung out his arms in a passionate gesture.

"Come to me, Ella. Our destinies demand it."

She too rose and faced him, her eyes shining like stars, and held out her hands.

"Yes, I will come," she said.

Roderick went into the warm June sunshine, thrilled with triumph, holding his head high. He walked along heedless of direction, turned into Hans Place and completed an entire circuit of the gardens before he realised what he had done. He paused, to think of some destination. Then he laughed aloud.

"Roderick, you must be in love," he said to himself. A long struggle with fortune had rendered it a rare occurrence for Roderick not to be perfectly aware of what he was doing and of what he was about to do. But the victory had come sooner than he had anticipated, and his immediate scheme of life was thrown into confusion. He turned to the right, and once

in Sloane Street, wandered north and found himself again undetermined at the corner of the Brompton Road. The driver of a crawling hansom touched his hat inquiringly. It was a brand-new, summer season cab, with horse and driver well turned out, and it caught his fancy. He stood upon the step, looked east, looked west, up and down the surging thoroughfare. Then obeying a sudden impulse, he shouted laughingly an address over the hood of the cab, —

"24 Weymouth Street."

He would go and present himself to an astonished Sylvester, acquaint him with his good fortune, and perhaps learn certain things concerning which delicacy had forbidden him to make too close inquiries. At any rate, there was a certain attractive impudence in the adventure. He lit a cigar and lay back on the soft cushions of the cab and regarded himself complacently in the strip of mirror. He was wearing well, he thought, as he caressed his Vandyke beard, and appeared by no means an unromantic lover. The deepening crows' feet about his eyes gave him a momentary uneasiness, but he parted his lips, and by way of compensation looked admiringly at his white,

even teeth. The conviction that there was nothing about him that would be otherwise than physically attractive to the most fastidious feminine sense brought him an assured content.

He gazed through the blue cigar-smoke up the long vista of clashing traffic broadening out by Hyde Park Corner, where London at its gayest displayed itself in the mellow afternoon sunlight. He waved his hand towards it as if summoning its blithe spirit to hear him.

"Do you think I'm going to give you up?" he said, breaking into a laugh.

For London, to the man of the pavement, the theatres, the studios, the newspaper offices, the clubs, the restaurants, means the elemental medium of his being. The deep bosom of Mother Nature would suffocate him. It is a picturesque thing to talk about, and it may be exploited by an ingenious contriver to his considerable advantage, but it did not satisfy the spiritual cravings of Roderick Usher. He had not the remotest intention of committing himself to lifelong exile with the Walden Art Colony, if his supple wit could devise other means of profiting by the enterprise.

"But I nearly lost you!" he apostrophised London again, after a few moments.

In a certain sense, he had been meditating flight, the summary abandonment of his broken fortunes too far gone for satisfactory repairing. For Roderick was a man who demanded more from society than his talents enabled him to give in return. Not that he was, in the general sense of the term, an adventurer. He had worked hard all his life; but he had always just not succeeded in his undertakings. He had written a play which an enthusiastic young manager had run at a loss for fifty nights. A second play evoked a chorus of delight among the newer school of critics, but had fizzled out after a week's unsatisfactory existence. His succeeding plays went the round of rueful and head-shaking managers. Professionally he was an artist. He painted pictures, but prices were low. One immense and ambitious canvas hung at the Royal Academy was to have brought him everlasting fame and fortune. It was taken over by a firm of art publishers whose royalties on prints after two years' waiting amounted to a few paltry pounds. Then for some reason or the other the Academy refused to hang him. Hence his bitter

hatred of the Academy and all its works. He had written a couple of novels which were universally belauded and nowhere bought. He was art critic, dramatic critic, reviewer, short-story writer. This work and the sale of such pictures as the dealers could be prevailed upon to purchase, together with private orders for portraits, brought him a maintenance. It would have been wealth to him who was content with beer, comfort to him who drank modest claret, but it was penury to the man who claimed at least 1889 champagne as a divine right. Roderick's career had therefore been an interminable battle with society. He rode through it a free lance, plundering it blandly whenever a chance offered. He had scarcely ever during his life as a man been free from debt. But his unflagging energy, his suppleness of humour, his buoyancy, his versatility, by winning popular esteem had saved him many times from social disaster. He played billiards too well; he played whist and poker too well. He was too disinterested an adviser of young men in search of ready money. Thus, somewhat paradoxically, he was welcomed at private houses, but looked shyly upon in clubs. Yet no one had hinted a dis-

honourable action. Twice or three times his father had groaningly sent him a cheque to cover some of his more pressing debts; but in justice to him, it must be said that in speaking of them to Matthew Lanyon, the old man had exaggerated the extent of his culpability. Nor had Roderick the slightest suspicion that any of Matthew Lanyon's money had ever found its way into his own pocket.

Once again, however, he found himself more seriously involved than ever, and his father pleaded empty coffers. There was a bill-broking transaction which might lead to unpleasantness. He had persuaded a foolish young man to back bills to the amount of two or three thousand pounds. In two or three months they could be renewed for a further period. But after that would come the deluge. Exile might save him. But where should he go? To the Colonies? He was too old. To Boulogne, to lead a shifty life with compatriot wastrels? "Sooner Death," said he. But for some time past, as it happened, the scheme of the Walden Art Colony had been idly occupying his disinterested attention. Suddenly his astute mind perceived in the scheme his own social salvation. His energy

quickly brought it into practicable shape. His plausibility staved off his creditors. His future position as salaried director of the Colony would secure him an honourable retreat from an untenable position.

But now with the heiress of an ample fortune as his affianced bride, he could laugh at fears and exultantly send the Colony to the devil. His luck had turned at last. Now he would get to the heart of life. And Ella was sweet, great-hearted, and beautiful. It was not only for her money that he wanted her. Perish the miserable thought! He could conceive a noble existence, all ideals. His thoughts touched the Empyrean. His facile nature easily persuaded itself of lofty purpose, and for the moment he was sincere. For Roderick was a man with wings to fly, but chained to the earth with fetters of brass; and often his wings fanning the air gave him the delusion of mounting heavenward.

The cab drew up at the dull and decorous door in Weymouth Street, at half-past six. A decorous man-servant opened it and showed him into the consulting-room, formally furnished with dark leather chairs and couch, and a desk on which lay the stethoscope, tongue-depressor,

and a few other ordinary instruments of the physician. Some old prints hung round the walls. The windows, glazed halfway, to insure privacy from the street, gave an air of gloom to the not over cheerful apartment. Roderick compared it with his own light and artistically furnished chambers, and wondered at the dark soul of the man who could live amid such depression.

He laughed his gayest laugh, however, when Sylvester came in.

"I 'm about as incongruous and unexpected here as you were the other day in the Park," said he. "But you 'll understand why I 've come when I tell you."

"I 'm very glad to see you," said Sylvester, politely. "Won't you sit down?"

He seated himself in the writing-chair and motioned his guest to another.

"No, thanks, I 'll walk about," said Roderick. "If I sat there I 'd feel too much like a patient, and you 'd be wanting to look at my tongue or pommel my stomach. I 've come, my boyhood's friend, to tell you some good news, to demand your felicitations. I give you a thousand guesses."

"Have you succeeded in floating your

chartered Thelema Company?" asked Sylvester, with a smile.

"Oh, damn the Colony! That is to say, comparatively damn the Colony. You behold in me the happiest man on earth, engaged to the sweetest and loveliest girl in the world. And the Colony 's in it for something. So I ought to have said 'thrice bless the Colony.'"

Sylvester started in his chair.

"You are not referring to Miss Defries?"

"I am so."

"I must offer you my congratulations," said Sylvester, recovering composure. Then despising himself for a momentary pang, which he could not explain to himself, he added: "I am sure she will make you an excellent wife."

"An excellent wife! Hear him, ye gods! As who should say, 'You will find this a most serviceable umbrella'! She 's the dewy dawn of all things sweet to live for!"

"My habit of mind is more prosaic than yours," laughed Sylvester. "But I think I am none the less accurate. Is Miss Defries going also to Thelema?"

"That is the present intention. But plans are but frail barks upon the capricious sea of time."

"I see," said Sylvester. "Now I understand your condemnation of the Colony."

"No, no; I am sure you don't," put in Roderick, hastily.

"Well, never mind," said Sylvester. "Have you obtained my father's consent?"

"Mr. Lanyon's consent? What for?"

"The marriage."

"But Ella is over age, — her own mistress.'

"Still, she must not marry without my father's consent, or she loses her money."

Roderick swept his hand in a magnificent gesture. "The money's neither here nor there. But of course your father will consent."

"He's the dearest old man God ever made," said Sylvester, in his grave way; "but he has queer crotchets now and then."

"But this is the end of the nineteenth century," laughed Roderick.

"I don't deny it. The other is a fact, all the same. The late Mr. Defries's will is valid. Appointing my father trustee for his daughter Ella, it provides for his administration of the estate until either her marriage with his consent or his own death, whichever is first. On either of these events, the whole money comes into her own keeping. If during his lifetime she

marries without his written consent, the money all goes to some specified charity, I forget what it is."

"Well, I never heard of such a damned silly will in all my life," said Roderick, falling into the vernacular.

"It only shows one man's implicit trust in the honour of another."

"And how much does it all run to?" asked Roderick, casually.

"I have n't the remotest idea," replied Sylvester. "It never entered my head to inquire."

Roderick took a few quick turns about the room, then he laughed in his buoyant way.

"Well, if Damon Lanyon is recalcitrant, Pythias Usher will soothe him down. So it will all come right. And you, camarado, shall dance at the wedding. I swear it. I must go and dress for dinner with some Philistines at Cricklewood. I shall be interested to see how God makes the creatures who live at Cricklewood. By the way, shall I give Ella your good wishes?"

"Most certainly," said Sylvester.

He accompanied his guest to the front door; then returning to the consulting-room, he opened the window, with an exclamation of

distaste. Roderick carried heavy scent about him, and Sylvester, like a wholesome Briton, detested scent. He also in his heart detested Roderick.

Before preparing for his solitary dinner he went into his laboratory to examine some tubes of gelatine in which the anthrax bacillus was thriving. But he gazed at them somewhat absently. Scorn and contempt were in his heart, — contempt for the woman whom once he thought fit to be his own wife, and who had now thrown herself away upon this plausible but vulgar charlatan.

"Like to like," he muttered cynically.

And putting down his gelatine he went upstairs, apparently satisfied with the examination he had entirely forgotten to make.

CHAPTER IX

DAMON AND PYTHIAS

Mr. Usher the elder had settled down in Ayresford a few months after the death of Sylvester's mother. At first he had taken a small cottage, then a semi-detached villa. Finally, he had transferred his household gods to a comfortable little house standing in its own grounds not far from Woodlands. He was not beloved in Ayresford on account of his habit of telling dull stories of uninteresting incidents in his past career; but as he went to church regularly and did no particular harm to anybody, he was accepted as a member of the humdrum society of the somnolent little town. No one knew much of his antecedents. He had been something in Australia and now lived on his means. That he had chummed with Mr. Lanyon, — a fact which he proclaimed so unceasingly that people grew nervous with teasing anticipation whenever Australia was mentioned in his presence, — was a sufficient

guarantee of his respectability. Then Roderick came on flying visits and with his brilliant ways acquired popularity. Later, when he produced plays, painted pictures for the Academy, and wrote novels, Ayresford was quite proud of him. The father gained a vicarious reputation. They wanted to make him people's church-warden. But here Matthew Lanyon intervened.

"I 'm not a church-goer myself," said he, "but I 'm hanged if I 'll let you make a mockery of the whole thing."

Whereupon Usher replied that it was a pity for lifelong friends to quarrel over such a trifle, and wrote a letter to decline the church-wardenship. But he put a little black mark and some hieroglyphics, with the date, in a little black book, half filled with similar inscriptions, which he kept locked up in his safe. This was some years before Sylvester had left for London, and the black marks had gone on increasing. Ebenezer Usher was a methodical man.

He was very proud of his house, which was tastefully furnished and contained a choice collection of old china, of which he was a connoisseur. Ayresford naturally put him down

as a man of substance, and though he entertained as little as decency allowed, he avoided the reputation of a miser. His elegant leisure was passed in collecting the china above mentioned, postage-stamps, and book plates, and in speculating through outside brokers.

One morning in June he sat at his table, by the open window, through which came all the scents of the lawn, immersed in his morning's work of sorting book plates. He had them before him in cardboard boxes neatly labelled on the back. They were divided into their several countries, subdivided into noble families and commoners, further divided into "Armorial," "Artistic-Armorial," and "Fanciful," and they were all arranged according to date. A manuscript catalogue by his side gave the reference to case and position. A pile of loose plates, unmounted, lay immediately in front of him, through which he was going one by one. If the plate happened to be new, he put it aside for mounting. If it was a duplicate, he fished out his original from its case and subjected the two to anxious scrutiny through a magnifying-glass, to decide which was the better impression. Of the sub-

ject he had profound knowledge, and he had a sincere appreciation of beauty of workmanship. At such times as this he was the most harmless of old gentlemen, dignifying the evening of his days with a learned pastime.

He was leaning back in his chair, lovingly scrutinising the almost fragile tenderness of an exquisite Bewick, when a servant brought in two letters that had come by the second post. He bade her put them on the table, and there they lay for some time while he continued the inspection of his Bewick. At last he laid it down with a sigh and opened the first letter. It ran: —

DEAR SIR,— We regret to inform you that the Great Elephant stock has fallen to $3\frac{1}{8}$. Kindly wire advice as to cover. We have every confidence in the stock and its ultimate recovery.

Yours faithfully,

PETER VAVASOUR & Co.

Mr. Usher groaned and threw the letter away from him. He felt a most ill-used man. The ingratitude of the world after a laborious lifetime spent in its service pained him exceedingly. The sight of Roderick's handwriting on the other envelope by no means brought

him comfort. Roderick's letters were rare, but unpleasantly to the point. He unfolded it with distrustful resignation. But when his glance had taken in its contents, his expression changed. He took off his gold spectacles, breathed on them, and wiped them with his handkerchief, and putting them on again, beamed at his son's letter: —

REVERED PARENT, — I 'm going to marry Ella Defries. Can't get shekels without Lanyon's consent to union. A silly will gives him the hold. Am writing now for his blessing. Better let me overhaul the draft of your letter of paternal welcome to her, as I know your effusive little habits.

Yours,

RODERICK.

"Ah, the flippant ways of youth," said he, with an indulgent smile.

The bucket-shop shark's application for cover came to him now through the rosy cloud of his content. What did a few hundreds matter when his only son was putting himself into a position to relieve from want his aged father's declining years? He almost caressed Mr. Vavasour's letter as he folded it up carefully and placed it with Roderick's in

the breast-pocket of his old frock-coat. He felt kindly disposed towards all mankind, and prepared with a benevolent air to go forth and visit his friend, Matthew Lanyon. He cleared his table of the book plates, scrupulously putting each in its proper case, and then rang the bell.

"My hat, Olivia. And my stick. No. The sun is warm. It is very hot. I shall take the green umbrella."

The elderly servant brought him these articles. He put on the Panama straw hat with his accustomed deliberation, while Olivia held the umbrella. Then he took the latter in his hand, and went out with his slow old man's tread.

On his way through the wide straggling main street of Ayresford, he paused, according to long custom, to look into the window of a little poverty-stricken bric-à-brac shop, garnished with a few rusty old pistols, bits of china, and worm-eaten books. To-day was displayed a couple of leaves torn from an old postage-stamp album. The eye of the collector at once fixed itself on a $7\frac{1}{2}d.$ Canada, green and unused. He hurried into the shop.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Driscoll; it is a very hot day."

A dejected old woman rose from a stool by the counter.

"The Lord sends it, Mr. Usher. We must abide by His mercies."

"We must indeed," replied Usher, wagging his head.

"I thought I would come in and help you, Mrs. Driscoll, by making a little purchase."

"You 're very kind, sir," said the old woman, mournfully.

"What might you be asking for these two sheets of postage stamps?"

"Ten shillings, I was told, sir."

Usher lifted up his hands pityingly and smiled.

"My dear Mrs. Driscoll, they are not worth half a crown. But I will be generous. It is one's duty to be generous to the poor and needy. I will give you five shillings."

"Very well, sir," said the old woman. The bargain was concluded, and Mr. Usher went out a very happy man. For a green, unused 7½*d.* Canada postage stamp, as all philatelists know, will fetch some eight or nine pounds, if judiciously put on the market, and Mr. Usher

had a beautiful specimen already in his collection. Fortune was really smiling on him this morning.

He reached Matthew Lanyon's office in a seraphic temper, which a quarter of an hour's wait did not ruffle. When Mr. Lanyon's client had departed, he was shown into the office, where Matthew was seated at his desk.

"I thought you would come," said Matthew, without further greeting. "Sit down."

"You are not looking at all well, my dear friend," said Usher. "You should really take care of yourself. I always say it is wrong for a man to let his business affairs get the upper hand with him."

It was true. Matthew had been ailing considerably of late, and his doctor had urged him to do a number of impossible things, — to go for a sea voyage, to reduce his practice, to take a partner. He was killing himself. He must stop, or human science would n't answer for the consequences.

"Human science can wait till she 's asked," the old man had replied with a certain humour. The past year had aged him considerably. His hair was greyer, his figure slightly bent, his face and hands thinner, his brow more care-

worn. Characteristically he had told Sylvester of none of his ailments, and during the week-ends Sylvester had spent at Woodlands, he had made special efforts to appear bright and strong. When Sylvester, anxiously informed by his aunt, questioned him, he had laughed in his cheery way, but with a touch of petulance, and asked how he, a man of science, could attribute any importance to Agatha's silly whimsies.

He was not the man to be fond of pity, even from those dearest to him ; *a fortiori*, he found Usher's sympathy particularly obnoxious.

"I 'm exceedingly well," he said somewhat irritably. "Better than I have been for months."

"Perhaps the pleasant news has cheered you," said Usher. "There is nothing like the happiness of others to make the heart young again. I am always rejoiced at the happiness of others. It is my nature."

He said it with such an air of dull simplicity, uttering each vocable with weighty deliberation, that a smile flickered around Matthew's lips. "I really think you believe it."

"I never disguise my sentiments. Falsehood is abhorrent to me."

"Rubbish!" said Matthew, curtly. "I'm busy. I can only give you ten minutes. What have you come for?"

"To share your happiness in the engagement of our dear children, — my son, your ward."

"I am not pleased at all. Even you ought to know that."

"Not pleased?"

"No. A marriage like that is an impossibility."

Usher opened his eyes in reproachful astonishment.

"Why?"

"How can I let my ward marry a man like Roderick?"

"My son is a fine fellow," said Usher.

"He's an infernal scamp," said Matthew, "and you know it."

"He has been a little wild, I allow," said Usher, indulgently. "But all young men sow their wild oats. Even you, Matthew, have committed indiscretions — "

"And I've paid for them a million times over," said Matthew. "My God! I have paid the uttermost farthing."

He passed his hand with a quick movement

across his face, as if to wipe out a sudden contortion of features.

"We need n't discuss the matter," he said in business tones. "I shall not give my consent."

"I don't understand why it is necessary," said Usher.

Matthew put him briefly into possession of the facts that Sylvester had disclosed to Roderick.

"They will marry without your consent," said Usher. Matthew laughed.

"It takes two to make a marriage, Usher."

Usher looked at him dully and sighed.

"I did not expect this ungenerosity from you, Matthew. Remember I am a father. I have always been a most affectionate father. My affection has always stood in my way. I plead for my poor son."

"Your poor son! Why, I 've supported him in comfort all his life. He earns a decent living himself, and twice I have saved him from gaol. By George, sir, he would have got there — and richly deserved it. If you think I 'm going to give my consent to Ella marrying that confounded attitudinising swindler, you take me for a greater rascal than yourself."

Matthew got up and walked about the room.

He was not a man who easily lost his temper, but the idea of this marriage infuriated him. Usher lifted a deprecating hand.

"Perhaps it can be arranged," said he.

"No, it can't. So you can go."

"We will withdraw our claim for five thousand pounds."

"Where do you suppose I'm to find five thousand pounds?"

"You can do what you like with Miss Defries's money, Matthew."

Matthew stopped in his walk, and his face grew livid. He pointed to the door.

"Go out," he said in a trembling voice, "or I'll have you turned out."

Usher rose to his feet and shuffled towards the door.

"Then poor Sylvester shall know what were the parents in whom he trusted."

"Let him know and be damned to you!" said Matthew.

He flung open the door into the outer office, and stood rigid and white with anger, as Usher passed out. Then, when he was alone, he put his hand to his heart, and staggering to an old couch threw himself down half fainting among the papers with which it was piled.

A clerk, coming in a few moments later to announce a client, found him white and gasping. But he insisted to the frightened youth on his being well again, drank a glass of water, and with a sheer effort of will, dragged himself to his feet and concentrated his faculties.

"Show Sir Trevor in," said he.

But the sudden attack rendered him weak and anxious for the rest of the day. He had never fainted like that before. It must have been the heat and the fury he had flown into with Usher. When he went home to lunch Miss Lanyon was alarmed at his appearance.

"Perhaps I 'm a little bilious. It is the heat. It 's nothing," he said obstinately.

Miss Lanyon looked at him sadly out of her faded blue eyes. If Dorothy, herself, or any of the household showed signs of poorliness, he would worry himself to death about it, get the doctors in, ransack the town for delicacies, and send special messengers from the office during the day to make inquiries. But where he himself was concerned, he was impatient of interference. Miss Lanyon shook her head. Men were insoluble enigmas.

In the afternoon he went round the garden

with his little granddaughter, submitting to be decorated with whatever flowers her childish fancy selected. He wore carnations round the ribbon of his hat, a Maréchal Niel rose in the lappel of his coat, and pansies stuck down his waistcoat, and he stalked on, gravely holding the child's hand and chatting with her on terms of comradeship. As they passed by the strawberry beds in the kitchen garden, Dorothy pointed to some ragamuffin children pressing their faces against the iron gate.

"Dirty little boys," she announced fastidiously.

"What would you sooner give them, — soap or strawberries?" asked the old man.

Dorothy reflected a moment.

"Soap is nasty," she said.

"Well, we'll give them some strawberries. Open the gate and call them."

She ran to the gate and gave the invitation. The children came in shyly, their mouths watering.

"Show them how to pick," said Matthew.

She bent down and picked and gave a berry to each of the children. The old man walked away. Presently Dorothy came running after him. Why had he gone off?

"They 'll eat more if I 'm not there," said he. "But why don't you stay?"

"One of them ate a slug," replied Dorothy, in disgusted dignity.

The old man threw himself down on a garden seat and laughed. Dorothy clambered on to his knees.

"Tell me about the kangaroos," she commanded. So for the next hour he entertained her with stories of kangaroos and monkeys and crocodiles and the strange beasts of far lands. Then Miss Lanyon came upon them, in search of Dorothy.

"There are some horrid little boys stealing the strawberries," she said.

"What! are they there still? They began an hour ago. I gave them leave."

"And they have been picking some of the green peaches that were coming on so nicely."

"They 'll enjoy them green better than we shall enjoy them ripe," said Matthew. "So let them be."

"I sha'n't. They 'll be ill," said Miss Lanyon, with spirit.

The old man went off to distribute halfpence among the children as a sort of compensation

for loss of stomach aches, and his sister carried off Dorothy.

"Dorothy," she said on the way, "your grandfather is a saint."

"You said he was the worry of your life to-day," said Dorothy.

"Because he 's too good, dear. We 're none of us good enough for him," said Miss Lanyon.

Matthew returned to the seat and slowly divested himself of his flowers, giving himself up for the moment to the peaceful charm of the afternoon hour. The place was dear to him. It was more or less the creation of his life. It was a small house in a little garden when he had brought his wife to Ayresford. And he had added on to both, bit by bit, building a wing, buying a few adjacent acres, until it had come to be a large property perfectly laid out.

The house stood mellow and homelike in the soft sunshine, with ivy and clematis clustering on walls and around windows. The lawn, smooth and well trimmed, stretched into the dimness of a little wilderness marked by shrubs. The sycamores on the other side of the house waved their tops above the roof. He

remembered when they were planted. She planted them. What a number of years ago! And there in the old part of the house was her window. The clematis had always been there. He remembered how it used to brush her cheek as she leaned out to call to him. It was just such an afternoon as this that her delicate face, like a pink shell, flushed with excitement, had appeared and she had summoned him nearer.

"Mat, Baby has cut a tooth."

My God! He could hear her voice now; almost wondered whether she had not withdrawn within, and whether the five and thirty years had not been a vague dream, and he himself was not young and vigorous and defiant of fate. But the quick memories of the day rushed back upon him and obscured the dearer vision.

The marriage was impossible. His heart yearned towards the girl whom he loved with an old man's tender affection. How could he allow her to marry a man whom he knew, from heredity, from actual facts that had come miserably within his own knowledge, to be an unprincipled adventurer? The misery of it was that his lips were sealed. He could not tell

her of Roderick's real character. To do that would be to break virtually the promise he had kept for over thirty years.

"Whatever I do for my own son, I shall do for yours."

He could no more blacken Roderick's reputation than he could Sylvester's. Perhaps the marriage would redeem him. Yet to stake the life's happiness of a human soul that was dear to him upon the chance of another's redemption was too great a responsibility. Why had she engaged herself to this man? It was not through love. He drew from his pocket the letter he had received from her that morning and read it through. It was constrained, artificial. The tone jarred upon their intimacy. Perhaps Ella had changed, grown worldly and cynical, lost her love for him. Or was it only the letter of a girl at war with her own heart? He had seen many such battles in his time.

"At any rate, I withhold my consent," he said decisively.

Yet Usher's threat agitated him more than he dared confess. He had never defied him before on that point. For a moment he was racked with a spasm of fear lest Sylvester should know the secret of his relations with

Usher. The fear had grown with the years into the roots of his life, had become an unreasoning terror. To save his son the knowledge, he had been killing himself by inches with work and worry.

Suddenly he rose, shook himself as if impatient of the clinging doubts, and walked briskly across the lawn. Usher dare n't do it, for his own sake.

Usher turned the corner of the house and met him by the door. Matthew frowned and regarded him angrily.

"I told you to go and be damned to you," he said.

"You made use of improper language, Matthew. You lost your temper. I never lose my temper. I am a most peaceful man. And I forgive. It is a Christian virtue. I thought you might change your mind on reflection."

"I have n't changed my mind," said Matthew.

Usher took an envelope from his pocket, withdrew a letter, and handed it to Matthew.

"Would you like me to send that to Sylvester?"

Matthew glanced through it; his fingers

trembled in spite of his will. But he tore the paper across and across and put the fragments into his jacket-pocket.

"You would not be such a fool as to kill the goose with the golden eggs," he said.

"I thought you would do that," said Usher, drawing another paper from his pocket; "but I have prepared a duplicate. I have always been a man of foresight. It is my firm intention to post this to Sylvester unless you give me your written consent to the marriage. I do not want money, Matthew. I have earned enough to keep me in comfort for the rest of my old age, and your promise to help my poor boy was based on no conditions. All the country says you are an upright man, Matthew. When I mentioned the five thousand pounds to-day, I was forgetting your scrupulous honour. I apologise. I always apologise when I am wrong. I am a just man."

All through this harangue Matthew's stern gaze had never left the puffy, white-bearded, common face. And he saw, not for the first time, beneath the old man's dull and red-rimmed eyes, a hard gleam of hate. But for the first time he realised that even to such a man there might be something dearer even

than money, and the chill fear fastened round his heart. He made an impatient movement across the threshold of the open door.

"Come into the library," he said. "It is an insult to God's sweet air to discuss such things here."

Usher followed him indoors. Some time later Miss Lanyon came down, having changed her dress for dinner, and leaned against the jamb of the creeper-covered porch and drank in the softness of the summer evening with the country-bred gentlewoman's vague mingling of happiness and regret. She had heard of the engagement. It had made her sad. Why had it not been Sylvester instead of Roderick? She sighed over the grave of her old maid's vicarious romance. A footstep behind her caused her to turn. It was Mr. Usher, buttoning his old frock-coat. His face showed grave benevolence.

"A father lives in his children," he said, after receiving her reluctant congratulations. "I live in my son."

The dinner-bell rang.

"I must go," he continued. "I came to see my old friend on business. He is so good. His time is always at the disposal of his friends."

"I told Dorothy this evening that he was a saint," she said.

Usher squeezed her hand impressively.

"He is indeed, Miss Lanyon. He is indeed."

But Matthew sat in his library chair staring in front of him in agony of spirit. He had yielded. The trace of the writing was there on the fresh blotting-paper before him. The strong man writhed under the humiliation of defeat. The proud, sensitive gentleman was tortured in his Nessus shirt of dishonour. And it comforted him not that it was for his son's sake. He felt as if he had ransomed him at the price of Ella's deliverance to the Minotaur.

CHAPTER X

SYLVESTER DOES BATTLE

Loss of faith in all through the faithlessness of one is a common and a tragic phenomenon. It is vain for the robust-minded to prove the illogic of the conclusion, which is one arrived at more from the emotional than the logical faculties of the brain. The phenomenon occurs only in men of a certain temperament. They are endowed with powers of intense individual passion, but lack that universality of sympathy which makes for breadth of judgment. To narrow the proposition to a particular case, they take one woman, not after long and patient deliberation, — that is the supreme pity of it, — but hap-hazard, on the impulse of a great emotion, and glorify her as the queen of all women. She becomes inevitably the test of a sex. The poor human touchstone fails, and a whole sex is condemned. To the commoner sort this loss of faith matters little, for the nobility of a great faith was never in them ; they cultivate an easy-going cynicism, and that is all. But

the men whose lives are broken, who feel within them the horrible weight of a dead ideal, are of nobler mould, and therein lies the piteousness of the tragedy.

Sylvester walked slowly homewards from his partner's house in St. John's Wood, where he had been dining. For Dr. Frodsham, who had ample means and a large family, had taken the opportunity of moving from the house in Weymouth Street into the purer air of the N. W. district, on Sylvester's entrance into partnership, and only retained a consulting-room, where he attended at certain hours. The sense of his loss hung heavy upon Sylvester. He had left a home that glowed with a happiness for ever beyond his reach. He had seen love, trust, sympathy, reflected from face to face of husband and wife. The house was glad with the laughter of youth. The somewhat intellectual atmosphere was softened by an indescribable tenderness of human relation. Faith in themselves as men and women, in humanity in general, gave a largeness to their social intercourse. And he had sat there recognising, wondering, envying, until the door had closed behind him and he was left to his loneliness on the silent pavement.

A boy and girl of the lower class passed slowly by, she with her head on his shoulder, he with his arm round her waist. They were saying nothing, probably were maintaining a half-hour's silence, but they were undeniably happy, and, for the moment, Sylvester envied them. Vulgar as may have been their affection, they, like the Frodshams, possessed that which he had lost for ever, — faith. And faith meant love and love meant life. He had seldom felt so keenly the abomination of his desolation, and the craving for a woman's touch grew to a pang like hunger. And yet his whole nature rejected the idea of fulfilment. He shuddered as he walked, and strove to turn his thoughts into another channel. But the elemental dominates a man's will. Unconsciously he returned to the subject. Ella had been much in his mind since Roderick's announcement. Her yielding to such a lover had strengthened his conviction of the contemptibility of a woman's nature. Cynically he congratulated himself on his escape. He set down nothing in extenuation. He only saw, on the one side, a woman of apparent refinement whom he had once thought worthy of being his wife, on the other side a blatant,

sensual, mercenary cad. The refined woman had thrown herself into the cad's arms. What was the need of looking further? Any woman would have done the same. The so-called virtuous were merely the untempted. The kindly matron at whose table he had been dining had only maintained her position by a series of lucky accidents. And what living soul could tell whether she had been true to Frodsham? But he envied Frodsham his unclouded faith and the happiness that love brought to his hearth.

Thus Sylvester walked homewards, his thoughts revolving in a vicious circle. At Baker Street Station he passed through a crowd that was gathering around two fringed and feathered coster-girls shrieking and biting and cursing in a policeman's grip. They were too much for one man, for your coster-girl in drink is a she-devil, and possessed of extraordinary activities. One escaped, and as her companion was struggling with the constable, she rushed at his face with a gigantic hat-pin held dagger-wise.

In an instant Sylvester had dropped his light coat and had seized the fury by the arms from behind. And there he held her pinioned. She kicked, she butted, she poured out tor-

rents of filth, she struggled, she tried to lie down, to the great excitement of the crowd, who, out of respect for the hat-pin, kept at a reasonable distance off, and expected to see a battle royal in which the slight man in evening dress would get the worst of it. But they were not prepared for such an exhibition of sheer strength on the part of the slight man. He stood like a figure of bronze, holding the foul and frenzied Amazon almost at arm's length, lifting her like a child when she tried to fall, forcing her down when she tried to leap into the air. The tussle, as far as Sylvester was concerned, did not last long; for two policemen, forcing their way through the throng, speedily relieved him of his charge and the lady of the hat-pin. Whereupon Sylvester, cheered by the crowd, coolly took his overcoat from a man who was holding it, and walked away down Baker Street.

The incident, although not tending to raise the Eternal Feminine in his esteem, broke the train of his morbid imaginings. He glowed with the sense of victory and chuckled quietly to himself. The successful application of one's own brute force brings exultation to the primitive savage in a man.

"I 'm not in such bad training, after all," he said to himself pleasantly.

So he sprang up the steps of the house in Weymouth Street in a much healthier frame of mind than that in which he had descended them some hours before. The sudden stirring of the blood had done him good.

"Mr. Lanyon is here, sir," said a servant, meeting him in the hall. "He said he would wait until you came home."

Sylvester disregarded the letters lying on the hall table, and ran upstairs to the drawing-room, where somewhat breathlessly he expressed his delight and wonder at seeing his father. But he was struck almost immediately with dismay at the look of illness on the old man's face.

"You have no business to be here," he exclaimed. "You ought to be in bed. For God's sake, father, what is wrong with you?" He looked at him keenly. "It is the heart, is n't it?"

"Yes, that and other things," Matthew admitted; "I have been a bit seedy lately. But I 'll look after myself; don't fret. And I did n't come here to talk about my inside. I had to come up to town on business, so

I thought I 'd look in instead of writing. I have n't been waiting long. You see, your man has made me quite comfortable."

He pointed to a tray by his side with whisky, soda, and glasses, and a box of cigars. Sylvester poured himself out a drink and bit off the end of a cigar.

"What 's gone wrong?" he asked, striking a match.

"This confounded marriage of Ella's."

"I would n't worry about it, father, if I were you. They are just worth one another. She has proved she 's on his level by accepting him."

"Not at all, not at all," said the old man. "That shows you know nothing of women. It is one of the most astounding facts about an astounding sex, that women of absolute refinement will throw themselves away upon the most obvious cad, be utterly blind to his coarseness, if once he gets a hold upon them. It 's a kind of helpless infatuation. It does n't at all argue the degeneration of the woman."

"Well, you can withhold your consent, and in the mean time try to open her eyes."

"I have already given my consent, and there are reasons why I can't open her eyes,"

said Matthew, rather slowly, looking at his finger tips.

Sylvester swung a straight-backed chair from its place and sat down near his father.

"Then you are not going to interfere at all? Don't you think that is the best thing you can do? Let them work out their own salvation or damnation, as the case may be."

"I love Ella as my own daughter, Syl, and I would save her if I could."

"Then I don't understand," said Sylvester.

"Forgive my being impertinent, Syl, but this is a serious matter. Were n't you fond of Ella yourself, some time ago?"

The eyes of father and son met, and the eyes of each were very keen.

"I would rather not answer the question," said Sylvester.

"You need n't," replied Matthew, taking a sip of his whisky and soda.

There was a short silence. Sylvester smoked on, his glance fixed on his father's face, his mind more concerned with the traces of illness and suffering that he read there than with the subject under discussion.

"Syl," said the old man, at last, looking at his son, "we are neither of us sentimental people."

"I suppose we're not," assented Sylvester, with a short laugh.

"Good. So what I want to say to you is serious. You have been a good son to me. I've tried to do my duty by you. But I've never asked you to do a thing for my sake during the whole course of your life. Do you think I should be justified in starting now?"

"It stands to reason," said Sylvester.

Matthew rose from his chair and put his hand on his son's shoulder. With all the tenderness of his heart, he was a man singularly little given to outward demonstrations of affection.

"Then do everything in your power," said he, "to stop this marriage. For my sake." He turned and walked away. "I can do nothing," he added.

"Very well," replied Sylvester, quietly; "I'll stop it."

"Don't undertake too much. I only asked you to try."

"I've said I'll stop it, and I will. Even if it comes to —"

"What?"

"To marrying her myself," said Sylvester, grimly.

Matthew sat down again, and then passed one of the long silences, so common between these two, who seemed to understand each other better when no words were spoken. Each man kept his own life's secrets hidden in his heart, would have gone through torture rather than reveal them to the other, or indeed to any human being, and yet each was dearer to the other than any being on earth. Speech, then, on intimate matters was dragged reluctantly and painfully from their souls, which preferred to hold a silent and mysterious communion. Even what he had said to Sylvester this evening seemed to Matthew an indecency, an exposure of an integral part of himself that the proud man kept hidden under a usually inscrutable veil of reserve. It was characteristic of both that the subject received no further allusion.

"I must think about turning in," said Matthew at last.

"I 'll go and see if they 've made things comfortable for you," said Sylvester.

"But, bless you, man, I 'm not billeting myself on you and turning your house upside down. I 'm putting up at the Charing Cross Hotel."

"You 'd better stay here for two or three days and let me doctor you a bit," said Sylvester.

But the old man pooh-pooh'd the idea. He did not want doctoring. He had had some worrying intricate business lately. These confounded landed proprietors, — they got their affairs into the most disastrous muddles, and when once they had put them into a lawyer's hands thought themselves relieved of all responsibilities and gaily went off to borrow more money. God may have made man in his own image, but he certainly forgot to supply the majority of the images with brains. However, he had set things straight by now and could take it easy for a bit. When he wanted Sylvester to doctor him, he would say so.

Against his will and better judgment, Sylvester had to let him go. He announced his intention of walking to Charing Cross, but Sylvester anticipated him by whistling up a hansom at the street door. Matthew protested. He had always walked home.

"Do something for my sake, — for a change," said Sylvester, with a touch of humour.

The old man laughed, entered the cab, and drove off.

Sylvester went upstairs to finish his cigar. The world seemed a more ironical place than it had appeared some hours before. He felt certain aches in his fingers and sundry tinglings in his shins. He stooped and rubbed the latter with a meditative smile. There was another young woman between whom and her desires he was about to come. He speculated on the prospect of rubbing his shins after that encounter.

"I wonder how it is to be done," he said, lying back in his chair.

His promise was given. He would have unquestioningly married his fair antagonist of Baker Street had his father so commanded. But all the same it was not without uneasiness that he contemplated his mission. And as for the girl he had undertaken to save, he assured himself that he took no interest whatever in her destiny.

To celebrate the engagement, Lady Milmo held a great reception to which came crowds of distinguished and undistinguished persons, but it was characteristic of her gatherings that the former far outnumbered the latter. The air hummed with congratulations and with laudations of Art. Sylvester, moving sardonically through

the press, felt like a visitor dazed by the whirl of a great unfamiliar factory. He confessed the feeling to an acquaintance who fluttered between the two worlds of art and science.

"The manufactory of artificial ideals," laughed the latter, having also to maintain a reputation for epigram.

The wit stayed to speak with a friend, and Sylvester tried to edge his way towards the further end of the room where Ella stood talking with a couple of men. From where he was he could see that she looked more than usually beautiful. Her face was flushed, her eyes held the light of enthusiasm, her young figure in a simple white silk dress stood out proud and defiant against the darkness of an open window. It recalled vividly to his mind her attitude when long, long ago she had passionately expressed her faith in the glory of the world. His lips twitched in a half-smile. All around him he heard snatches of conversation in which the engagement was alluded to. A man cast doubts on Roderick's solvency. A girl declared she would just as soon marry a steam-organ. A lean, anxious woman with a mechanical grin ecstaticised over the union. The Art Colony was discussed on all sides.

Presently Roderick, resplendent in a great white bow that fell half over his shirt-front and almost hid a topaz solitaire, caught sight of him and hailed him with a southern wave of his hand.

"My dear comrade," he cried as soon as he was within hand-shaking range of Sylvester, "it does my heart good to see you here to share our joy. Have you spoken to her yet? There she is —

> 'Oh, she is fairer than the evening air
> Clad in the beauty of a thousand stars!'

Is n't she? A throbbing moment, *amigo*."

"I 'm glad to see you so much in love," said Sylvester. "It 's refreshing."

"Cynic!" said Roderick. "That 's why your hair is turning grey. Look at mine, — fresh as a rose in June. And I 'm older than you."

"How 's the Utopia?"

"Colossal. Come, I'll introduce you to Sir Decimus Bland. Lady Dering has fixed me with her glassy eye, and I must obey her call. Sir Decimus, let me present my oldest and most valued friend, Dr. Sylvester Lanyon, the terror of bacilli."

Sir Decimus was a portly, red-faced man who, from a habit of holding his hands in front of him, looked as if he were supporting a model of one of his Art galleries after the self-conscious manner of a "donor," supporting his church in the company of various saints in an old Italian painting. He puffed as he spoke and glared amiably through a single eye-glass.

"Delighted to make your acquaintance, Dr. Lanyon," said he. "Your name is a household word in the domain of science. In our domain we also have bacilli to fight against, — commercialism, insincerity, all the cankers that destroy the soul of art."

"So you are going to choose an environment unsuitable for their development, I hear," said Sylvester.

"Yes, the Walden Art Colony. I am, as you may know, guaranteeing the Director's salary. Our fortunate friend is just the man for the post."

"When do you think it will take practical shape?" asked Sylvester.

"We hope to start next spring — and under very happy auspices. I look upon this as a fitting culmination to the poor services I have been able to render to Art in this country.

Are you interested in the movement, Dr. Lanyon?"

"Not financially. I hardly know enough about it. One thing I don't quite understand. I thought an artist gave out the experience he had gathered in his contact with real life. How is he going to get that contact if he buries himself in what amounts to a desert island?"

"He goes direct to nature," replied Sir Decimus, platitudinously.

"Does he?" argued Sylvester. "Rocks and trees are all very well for pretty pictures. But what about love and sorrow and other human emotions. He seems to get away entirely from the important side of nature."

"Yes, yes, so I grant. But it's hardly that," puffed Sir Decimus, mopping his forehead. "Ah, here is Urquhart; he will tell you all about it. Don't you know Urquhart?"

He performed the introduction, stated the case at great length with a confusion that irritated the scientist's trained mind, and then, with visible relief, moved away. Bevis Urquhart, a slight young man, with a tiny silky black moustache and a languid manner, began a patient explanation. Sylvester had heard of him

as a lad of great wealth who had convulsed a whole county by refusing to ride to hounds and uttering blasphemy against partridge shooting. It was whispered that he had invented a new religion and had an oratory in his bedroom fitted with expensive idols made of chrysoprasus.

"It is the mistake of the crowd," said he, "to regard Art as an interpretation of experience. Art has nothing to do with Life. Life claims all for itself and so kills Art, drains it of its blood. In other words, Life claims Art, Art does not claim Life. If not, Art would be unexpressed. The poem would remain a pure crystal in the soul of the poet, the picture a fair-hued mist in the fantasy of the painter. Art is the revelation of the Undetermined, and this can only reach its fulness in the quietude of the soul."

"Thank you," said Sylvester; "you have given me a lucid solution of my difficulty."

The young man smiled deprecatingly.

"Pardon me. I try to be an artist in words, and lucidity is so brutal and commonplace. Do you read Mallarmé?"

"No," said Sylvester. "When I want wholesome unintelligibility I read Rabelais."

Urquhart looked pained. There was a slight pause.

"Fond of bicycling?" asked Sylvester, cheerily.

Again came the pitying smile over the face of the young semi-millionaire.

"I know so little of the things one does with one's body," he said.

"Better learn," said Sylvester. "Capital exercise. Shakes up your liver, you know."

Here he was carried off by Lady Milmo, who was dying to introduce him to somebody.

"Do you understand all the things they talk about here?" he asked.

Lady Milmo regarded him with a twinkling eye.

"God bless your soul, no," she said.

"I suppose they 're all exceedingly clever?"

Lady Milmo stood upon the points of her toes and looked around, as if to take in all her guests in one comprehensive glance. Then she half whispered into his ear, —

"They 've all got to talk like that to one another for the sake of their reputations. But I go round and talk to each in turn of their

cooks or their stomachs, according to sex,— and they love it!"

"Well, I'd sooner talk to you, Lady Milmo,— though not of my stomach,— than to any of these people," said Sylvester, with a laugh. "Can't you steal five minutes?"

Lady Milmo spied a couple of vacant chairs in a near corner, and sitting down on one motioned Sylvester to the other. Then she smiled. She was a kind-hearted woman, and in spite of her false air of youth possessed much charm of manner.

"I suppose you want to talk about the engagement!" she said.

"No, not particularly. What do you think of this Colony, where Ella proposes to exile herself?"

"Utter rubbish," said Lady Milmo.

Sylvester expressed surprise. "I was under the impression that you were one of its fervent propagandists."

"Oh, one must do something," she replied inconsequently. "One bubble is just as good as another to blow during the season. Whether it's providing eau de cologne for released criminals, or founding a Garden of Eden for unsuccessful poets, it all comes to the

same thing in the end. You look puzzled. Well, what is one person's amusement is another's bewilderment."

"But all these promoters — Ella and Roderick — they believe in it?"

"Oh, yes, they believe in it. People will believe in anything,— Mr. Urquhart's new religion, for instance. But the Art Colony is rubbish. Don't put a penny in it. I have n't. It may be a romantic toy for Ella to play with for the first two years of her married life, but then she will come back and settle down to a reasonable existence. You won't give me away, will you?"

Sylvester promised, and a few moments later found himself standing alone, wrapped in gloomy wonder at the inanity of life. A voice roused him from his meditation.

"Good-evening, Sylvester."

He started and found Ella by his side. She looked at him boldly, with a little triumphant gleam of defiance. He shook hands, explained that his object in accepting the invitation was to offer her his congratulations. Social convention required the formula. Ella's ear, however, detected an ironical note, and the blood came swiftly to her cheeks.

"For a man who scorns hypocrisy —" she began; then checked herself. His regard of grave inquiry made her swiftly conscious of a false position, and her cheeks flamed hotter.

"You know what I mean," she said. "You don't really congratulate me."

"Why do you say so?"

"I feel that you are inimical to me, and you have never liked Roderick."

"One can wish one's enemies well," he remarked with a half-smile.

"Why should we be your enemies? You should hear how differently Roderick speaks of you."

"My dear Ella," replied Sylvester, "I have not uttered a single word against Roderick. It would be in very bad taste for me to do so. I have known him for many years, and we still meet. But he is not an intimate friend of mine."

"You dislike him," said Ella. "I feel that you do."

The feline that is in the nature of all women — just as its stronger, tigerish development is in the nature of all men — tingled to her finger ends. She felt the velvet sheaths stiffen back. The sight of him angered her. She

itched to provoke him to battle, to fall on him tooth and claw if he took up her challenge. An unreasoning instinct clamoured also for violent defence of Roderick. It was a psychological moment full of many feminine complexities which she half understood; and that made her the more angry.

Sylvester, looking only on the surface, smiled somewhat contemptuously at her desire to scratch. Certainly he had undertaken a campaign against her; but he felt that so undignified a skirmish was not the wisest preliminary to hostilities. He had come here, besides, to reconnoitre.

"Why should I dislike Roderick?" he asked.

"Because you never try to understand anybody. Because Roderick has not locked himself up in your iron cage of convention; because he has n't set himself up on a pillar of impeccability as you have done. You sit within your own prim parlour of moderation and think the man who goes to generous extremes is a lost soul. You need not have congratulated me. I should not have resented it. I should have understood and have given you credit for honesty."

But Sylvester was not to be drawn into strife. He replied equably that he would withdraw his congratulations, if they offended her. Meanwhile they might talk of something pleasanter. She suggested Shakespeare and the musical glasses, with a fine air of disdain.

"Or the Walden Art Colony?" said Sylvester.

"What have you to say against the Colony?" she flashed.

"Nothing at all. Do you believe in it?"

"With all my heart. It is a great movement. It is an idea to live for. It is the first thing I have had to believe in since — since I threw off the girl and became a woman."

"And I sincerely hope it won't be the last," he replied with grave irony. And as a young man drew nigh to take his leave of Ella, he bowed and turned away with a saturnine sense of a victory after which there would be no rubbing of shins. But Ella, although she smiled sweetly on the young man, felt that she had been foolish in wantonly exposing herself to Sylvester's cold mockery, and the brightness of her evening suffered a miserable eclipse. It was only when Sir Decimus Bland came up

and talked Colony with ponderous patronage, and elevated her to the dignity of high-priestess of the undefined cult of the Higher Art, that she regained her self-respect and looked more serenely on the universe.

CHAPTER XI

UNREST

It was late October. People were beginning to return to London, and among the early arrivals was Lady Milmo, who had been longing to escape from the discomforts of foreign hotels and English country-houses to her own familiar surroundings in Pont Street. With her came Ella, who was anxious to resume the work of the Colony. She had spent the latter part of July and August in Ayresford. It had been a time of rest and quiet happiness, for she loved the old man in a wistful, daughterly way; yet, in spite of his tender courtesy, she had divined in him the same antagonism to Roderick as she had discovered in Sylvester, and this had put a constraint in their relations which had never before existed. The engagement was seldom referred to, and though the girl's cheek flushed with pleasure at Roderick's morning letter, yet during the rest of the day she was happier when he was not vivid in her thoughts.

At first it had been arranged that Roderick should pay a long-promised visit to his father at the same time. But when it came to the point of making definite arrangements, he had found his presence, in the interests of the Colony, essential elsewhere. As a matter of fact, the elder Usher jarred upon his son's more refined susceptibilities. His personal acquaintance with Ella was sufficiently annoying to Roderick; but to sit by in silent apology, while she was being overspread with unctuous and paternal platitudes, was an ordeal too exasperating to face. So following as usual the line of least resistance, he had accepted one or two pleasant and profitable invitations. His non-appearance, though she credited herself with a feeling of disappointment, was a relief to Ella. She had passed lately through many conflicting emotions, and she needed solitude, a period of moral repose, wherein to realise both herself and circumstances. For a proud girl does not surrender to a man almost against her will, without striving in her heart to account it to herself as a victory. The fact of the strained relations between Matthew and Usher, of which Miss Agatha Lanyon informed her, also mitigated her regret. They

were at daggers drawn, did not even salute each other in the street. Roderick's absence avoided a grotesque Montague and Capulet situation. It further saved her from much personal intercourse with Usher, for whom she entertained no very high opinion. Once, however, she dined with him ceremoniously. He talked in his reiterative way of the comfort a daughter would be to his old age, and represented himself as the most generous and indulgent of parents. He alluded to Matthew more in sorrow than in anger. A man with whom he had been in intimate bonds of friendship for forty years to throw him over at the last! It was grievous; it was ageing him rapidly. He was always a faithful friend. It was his disposition. The saint leered at her out of his red-rimmed eyes, and Ella felt a shiver of repulsion which lasted till the next morning, when a fervid epistle from Roderick restored her serenity.

"I can't make out why Matthew and Mr. Usher have quarrelled," said Miss Lanyon during the day.

"And I wonder why they have n't quarrelled for forty years," returned Ella. "Oh, don't look shocked, auntie. It is no reason for me

to adore a man because I am engaged to his son!"

Thenceforward she became a violent though silent partisan of Matthew in his dispute. There must have been serious grounds for such a quarrel; Matthew could do no wrong; therefore Usher must have treated him shamefully. The syllogism was perfectly conclusive. This feeling and a growing anxiety as to the old man's health did much to lessen the constraint between them. For he was constantly ailing, and was not the man she had seen fifteen months before. She left him with great reluctance, in spite of the glowing impatience of Roderick, with whom she was to spend some weeks as the guest of Sir Decimus Bland.

Now it was October, and London life began again. Lady Milmo busied herself in spinning her gossamer web of affairs and appeared smiling and contented. Ella devoted herself to such studies as she considered would be of benefit in her peculiar position as Lady Director of the Colony. Roderick was ever by with suggestion and advice. Things were going splendidly. Some three thousand pounds had already been subscribed and lay at Roderick's bankers. Three thousand more

had been promised, irrespective of Sir Decimus's undertaking to provide the Director's salary. With another four thousand they could start. Ella offered to provide it. Roderick shook his head. It had better come from the great heart of the public. She persisted and wrote to Matthew. He urged her almost passionately not to put money into the scheme until she was married. Thus Roderick and Matthew were in accord on the point, and Ella was puzzled.

"When is it to be, dearest?" asked Roderick one day.

The question came suddenly after a short pause in their talk. It was during the few minutes before dinner. Roderick was dining in Pont Street, and Lady Milmo not having come down yet, they were alone.

"You know," replied Ella, with a half-smile.

"Ah, do I?" said he. "I don't love contingencies. I long for the glorious life with you, my wonderful Ella. And I am a man, and waiting is hard."

She flushed slightly. The consciousness of being desired ever quickens a woman's pulses. But she also loves the sense of mastery in

maintaining herself within impregnable walls. In this perhaps lies the delicious paradox of her sex.

"I keep to my terms," she said. "Within a week of our starting for the Colony. Not before. It will give a new sacredness to our work and to our married life if we begin them both at the same time."

"But who knows when the inauguration of the colony will be?" asked Roderick.

"It could be now, practically, if you would let me furnish the deficit."

"Ah, no," he said. "You would be acting against a principle very dear to me. It must be others who give their money. We give our lives. If you subscribe, the prestige of the Colony as a great public movement is gone. It is bound to come to ripeness. But like an exquisite fruit it takes time."

"I am happy to wait for the ripening," said Ella.

"But I?" He threw out his arms passionately. "Ella, do you know what the madness of love is? Don't you fear that in the first rapturous days of life with you I might forget the work for your enchantment? Would it not be better to begin the work in the

sweet fulness of our wedded life, — when we have learned each other in the way that only wedded life can teach?"

"It will be better to begin things together," she replied with feminine reiteration.

He pleaded flamboyantly. Why not fix the date of his great happiness for Christmas, — the time of universal rejoicing? The marriage would stimulate imaginations. The deficit would be made up fourfold. Subscriptions would come in by way of wedding gifts. Ella remained calmly obdurate.

"Before I loved you, the cause was everything to me. Since then, you are everything. The cause is second. It is the irrefragable law of life and love."

"To me," replied Ella, "the cause and you are one."

She glanced up swiftly and caught, as it seemed, a look of irritation on his face, — a contraction of the brows, a snarl of the lips between the auburn moustache and beard, showing the teeth. But it passed like a lightning flash and left his face aglow with such exuberant adoration that she attributed it to some trick of shadow, and dismissed it from her mind.

But as the days went on, a vague uneasiness took root and began to grow. Roderick spoke less of the Colony, more of herself. Negotiations appeared to be at a standstill. No more names swelled the subscription list; Roderick took no further steps to make fresh converts among the young and ardent. He pleaded the necessity of work to supply ordinary personal needs. He tried to awaken her enthusiasm over a flaring picture of *Love the Destroyer*, which he had begun to paint. She went one day to his studio to see it. Love stood, triumphant and cruel, a two-handed sword in his hand. Around him was the carnage for which he was responsible. An emaciated creature at last gasp was kissing his feet. There was a suggestion of the flesh in it that jarred upon the girl. The commonplace of the conception chilled her. She remained staring at the picture. It was long before she could trust herself to look at Roderick. At last she did so, unable to hide her disappointment.

"You do not like it?" said Roderick, eagerly.

"Forgive me—" she began rather piteously.

"Say no more," he cried, and with a magnificent gesture he seized a cloth, and in great, swift sweeps of his arm smeared the picture into a horrid chaos of greens and yellows. Ella sprang forward with a little cry.

"So perish all in me that you deem unworthy!" he exclaimed fervently.

The act brought the woman in her to his feet. Who was she to judge the creation of an artist's genius? Had he let it stand, she would have loved the picture. The annihilation, at her bidding, of the result of days of artistic travail smote her with a sense of guilt. She was ready to lament a lost masterpiece. She would never rest until he repainted it. He magnanimously refused. The first impression of a picture on a pure and beautiful soul was the true one. She would be the touchstone of all his life's work. He sent her away at once raised and humbled. But to make amends, she threw herself earnestly into a new conception of the subject that he put before her, and watched it taking shape upon the canvas with intense eagerness. And in the meanwhile the Colony was not quite so much on the surface of her thoughts. Now and then, however, she

questioned him anxiously. Once he turned upon her in solemn reproach,—

"Do I understand that you are afraid of my faltering in the sacred cause to which we have devoted ourselves?"

Ella was impressed with his dignity and again rebuked herself for her want of faith. Women are indignant when they are told how often they are taken in by fustian.

November came. She met Sylvester at dinner one evening at Lady Milmo's for the first time since the At Home in July, given to celebrate her engagement. He sat silent during the meal. Roderick, who made the fourth, was in his gayest mood. Rebellious defiance again came uppermost in the girl's heart, and she strove to put forward all her brilliance. She compared the two men: one, cold, sombre, severe,—a mere intellect clothed in the outer semblance of humanity; the other warm-hearted, enthusiastic, sensitive to every impression of life, and gifted with a perception of a world that had never entered into the purview of his fellow's dreams. She fortified her unmitigated resentment against Sylvester with disdain. How could she ever have loved such a bloodless piece of mechanism? She

lashed with scorn her girlish folly. A heightened colour and an added lustre to her eyes rendered dazzling her ordinary girlish beauty.

"You are not one, but all wondrous womankind's epitome to-night," whispered Roderick, in the drawing-room afterwards.

"That is foolishness," she replied, "but I—I was just going to say I have never felt so proud of you as I have done this evening."

Roderick laughed. "I 'm afraid it is because dear old Syl sits by so glum while I 'm such a chatterbox," he said.

Ella shot a swift glance upwards. Really this man had marvellous intuition. Could he ever have suspected — ? Her cheek burned. But to her comforting no trace of malicious insinuation lurked in the frankness of his eyes. His deprecation of her tribute was sincere.

Lady Milmo went to the piano. She had a dainty taste in music, and having lately added an obscure but colossal Herzigovinan rhapsodist to her menagerie, found intense delight in his compositions. He was only two and twenty and had already reached op. 236. This Lady Milmo began to play, while Roderick self-sacrificingly turned over the leaves. Syl-

vester exchanged commonplace remarks with Ella. The consciousness of the task he had undertaken somewhat weighed upon him. He was to break off the marriage. How? Only by fair means. A man of scrupulous honour, he characterised as foul any secret investigations into Roderick's financial position or past career. Nor could he asperse Roderick's character while maintaining with him a semblance of friendly relations. To declare open war would be foolish. He could do nothing but bide his opportunity. Meanwhile he was less than ever at his ease with Ella. She, however, interpreted his constraint as contemptuous indifference, and once more she longed for battle. The memory of her humiliation on the night of Lady Milmo's reception only made her irritation more unbearable. A chance remark about his father gave her the longed for opportunity to stab.

"I suppose you know Uncle Matthew's health is failing," she said suddenly.

"I am afraid so," he said.

"Then why are n't you by his side to take care of him? Since you left he has been gradually breaking down. Neglect is killing him."

Sylvester curled the ends of his moustache and regarded her impassively.

"You are trying to hurt me," he said. "I do not neglect my father."

"No. You are a paragon of all the excellences. If you had some infirmities, you might be a better and a happier man."

"I do not believe in the new doctrine of the saving quality of evil," he replied. "I am of the old-fashioned opinion that evil taints the character, blunts the moral sense, and comes out sooner or later in evil actions."

"You talk like a Sunday-school tract," said Ella, with a short laugh. "But I was speaking of Uncle Matthew —"

"I should like to speak of him too," said Sylvester, curtly. "Your engagement is a great unhappiness to him. He loves you like his own daughter. You know that. If you had consulted him beforehand, perhaps it would have been kinder. What his reasons are for wishing it broken off I do not know, but you may be quite certain they are good ones."

Ella looked across the room to the piano where the Herzigovinan rhapsody was in full tumult of crashing chords, and then edged

nearer Sylvester on the couch where they were sitting.

"Are you aware that you are committing an impertinence in speaking to me like that?" she said in an undertone. "How dare you? I acknowledge Uncle Matthew as my guardian. But you — what right have you to touch upon my affairs? What concern can you have in them?"

"Absolutely none, — personally. But my father is dear to me. If I could break off your engagement to please him, I should do so."

"Are you going to try?"

"Yes, I shall try," he replied coldly. Their eyes met in undisguised enmity.

"It would take a better man than you, Sylvester Lanyon," she said.

She rose and walked to the fireplace, with an air of great stateliness. Sylvester did not attempt to follow her, but lay back on the couch as if rapt in the music. But his evil mood was upon him. He had at once divined her desire to wound him in his tenderest spot. It was like a woman. He felt a great scorn for her. The music suddenly ceased. He uttered a conventional murmur. Roderick broke into ecstatic comment.

"A divine genius! Interpreting the message of the wild winds of his mountain fastnesses, — the elemental throbbing in the hearts of his rugged forefathers. Ella, Moskovic must come to Walden. This supreme spirit must not be clogged by the banality of London concert rooms. He must breathe the freedom of the woods and streams."

"He has half consented already," said Ella.

"The silly fool!" muttered Sylvester, beneath his breath.

"Ah, my comrade," cried Roderick, turning suddenly round, "what message has science to deliver comparable to this?"

"None that I 'm aware of, thank Heaven!" replied Sylvester.

Roderick broke into his gay laughter and crossed the room.

"We must think of him kindly, as good Catholics do of those that sit in darkness and ignorance, eh, Ella?"

With a lover's gesture he passed his arm lightly around Ella's waist, and drew her with ever so delicate a pressure a little nearer to him, and looked tenderly into her eyes.

Sylvester started to his feet. A feeling unexpected, undreamed of, hateful, passed through

him, — a wave of disgust, of sudden, fierce hatred of Roderick standing there as the undisputed possessor of Ella Defries. Had the man kissed her, he would have struck him. A phrase formulated in Heaven knows what cell of his brain leaped with ghastly suddenness into his mind. How dare that loathsome brute touch her? The revulsion was physical, almost unendurable. It lasted but a moment or two. Then Ella moved away and Lady Milmo came up with a light remark, and the world was as it was before, — a great grim vanity which he regarded with apathetic indifference.

He took his leave early, pleading professional duties. Ella gave him a defiant hand and her lips had a contemptuous curl as she bade him good-night. Roderick, taking upon himself the part of man of the house, accompanied him downstairs and pressed whisky and soda upon him amid fervid expressions of regard. The discreet man-servant helped him on with his overcoat, and the welcome cold air of the street was upon him. There was a touch of early frost and the stars shone clear. The memory of his unaccountable seizure half an hour ago brought back the memory of a night in Ayresford when he had read, as his heart

prompted, the message of the stars. He hailed a passing cab, entered it with the air of a man who has the business of life to consider and not the dreams of a dead past. But in spite of himself the dreams came back, ugly and chilling, and he spent the drive home in brooding thought. What did Roderick's caresses matter to him? Did he not despise Ella utterly? For aught he cared they might marry into eternal misery to-morrow. It was only for his father's sake that he wished to part them. Roderick was a plausible knave, Ella a woman, feline, treacherous, delicate of face and gross of soul. They were well paired. He laughed cynically as he settled down to his evening's work in his laboratory. Here at least were things which he could understand. The growth of a bacillus in a bed of jelly was comprehensible. He could see it, test it. But who could see the growth of a lie in the heart of a human being? And the man himself was unconscious that a dead love had awakened that evening from its sleep and had passionately, for one brief instant, raised the stone that covered the mouth of its tomb.

CHAPTER XII

THE CAUSE WANES

RODERICK drove away from Lady Milmo's in a far more comfortable frame of mind than Sylvester. The evening had been a success. Hitherto, in spite of his conviction that his hold upon Ella was secure, he had been puzzled as to the nature of her feelings towards him. Over the life-work they were to carry out in common she had always glowed; in their purely personal relations she had exhibited a sad lack of emotionality. His vanity had often been piqued by her regarding him less as a man than as the incarnation of an idea. At the same time his own feelings had been simulated to love. He honestly desired her beauty, youth, and wit. As a proof thereof, he had abandoned with entire distaste the latest of the many minor affairs of the heart in which his emotional life had been spent. A breath of something sweeter, purer, nobler, had stirred his soul. The train of courtesans shrank back affrighted, and he

walked serene with the higher woman. But desiring her thus uniquely, the man in him craved response. Until to-night she had given none. To-night, however, the statue had grown warm woman. She had avowed her pride in him, had yielded adorably to his caress; before they parted she had given him her lips.

At last he felt the triumph of possession. At last she was his to mould and cherish. A little pleading and their wedded life would dawn with the New Year. He was confident of victory.

Yet his heart sank like lead two days afterwards, when he had dropped a couple of letters into the pillar-box outside his chambers. He stopped and gazed abstractedly at the oblong imperturbable mouth of the red, almost personal thing, to which he had irrevocably intrusted his destiny. For the letters contained cheques to the amount of over three thousand pounds, and the balance at his bankers, on whom they were drawn, consisted mainly of the funds of the Walden Art Colony.

Yet what could he have done? To-morrow the bills, once renewed, with a foolish youngster's name at the back of them, would fall due. His father, to whom he had trusted, had refused

help. The forcing of the youngster to pay would at the least create scandal, and scandal would mean loss of reputation, loss of Ella, and general downfall. Misappropriation of the funds saved his credit for a season. It would give him time to urge on his marriage, whilst he cunningly arrested the progress of the Colony. Once married, he was practically master of Ella's fortune. A pretext for obtaining a few thousands, so as to replace the misappropriated sum with his bankers, would easily be found by a man of his resource. Before posting the letters he had felt the half-contemptuous exhilaration of the gambler who bets on a certainty. But now that the bet was entered and made final, doubts and fears began to assail him. He looked two years older as he walked down St. James's Street to his club.

A whisky and apollinaris restored his nerves, so that when young Lathrop, who had backed the bills, came up to him with a long face, he was able to assume his southern manner.

"Dearest of friends — " he began.

"It strikes me, Usher, *you*'ll be the dearest of friends to-morrow," broke in the young man, — "those confounded bills, you know."

"Bills!" cried Roderick. "What are you

talking to me of bills for? Do you think I am going to let the bloodsuckers feast upon your young and beauteous form? My child, put aside that pessimism which is sapping your youth. Behold, Israel is satisfied."

He drew his cheque-book from his pocket and showed the counterfoils to the two cheques. Lathrop looked intensely relieved. Then he blushed and stammered. He was devilish sorry; but the time was getting so close. Would Usher have a drink? Roderick assented and drank another whisky and apollinaris.

"You need n't noise abroad the fact of my astounding solvency," he said, before they parted. "I hope you have n't told any one about the bills."

"Only Urquhart. I saw him last night," said the young man.

"You 'll be a Metternich yet, Willie," replied Roderick. As young Lathrop belonged to the diplomatic service, he was dimly conscious that his friend's remark was in some fashion ironical. But Roderick waved him a flourishing adieu and swaggered out of the club.

A man met him on the steps.

"Seen Willie Lathrop lately?"

Roderick looked him squarely between the eyes.

"He 's a braying jackass," he said.

Having thus conveyed an answer to the implied question and given vent to his anger at the same time, he hailed a cab and drove to Pont Street. It was a foggy, murky day. Already the lights had appeared in shop windows, and, where they streamed, the pavement and roadway glistened in brown slime. Impressionable to external surroundings, Roderick shivered and drew his fur coat closer round him. The world wore an air of hopeless depression. On such a day no human undertaking could prosper. It was only his intellectual contempt for superstition that restrained him from turning round and driving back to his club. The dreary stretch of Sloane Street seemed interminable. At last he arrived and was shown up to the drawing-room. Lady Milmo, Ella, and a lady visitor were having afternoon tea. He exerted himself to amuse in his usual way, but his efforts resulted in failure. When should he be able to see Ella alone? The lady visitor seemed resolved to outstay him. She plied him with questions

concerning the Colony. He replied vaguely. Realisation of the project was a long way off. To start such a concern otherwise than on a sound financial basis was magnificent, but it was not business. He was thinking of a last appeal to the public. Ella listened, somewhat out of spirits. Roderick's pessimistic utterances argued loss of faith in the Colony. He caught her glance fixed upon him with perturbed questioning, and his depression deepened.

At last they were alone. He cleared his throat and plunged into the midst of things. Speech restored his confidence. He made an eloquent appeal. He loved her, worshipped her; the deferring of their marriage to an indefinite date was making his heart sick, robbing him of energy and the joy of life. Christmas it must be. He hinted at personages waiting for their marriage to subscribe largely to the fund. What had the marriage to do with it? Well, he was an artist, a Bohemian; his very class did not inspire confidence. But his marriage would set upon him the seal of irreproachable responsibility. He pleaded desperately, the restoration of the three thousand pounds being his paramount and imperative aim. His heart sank at the coldness with

which she received his fervour. His ear detected the note of insincerity, to which he felt conscious she, too, was sensitive.

"I can't marry you yet, Roderick," she said, at length, wearily. "I can't. It means too much."

"Then you don't love me," he exclaimed, starting to his feet. The old dramatic device did not succeed.

"Sometimes I do," she said. "At others — I don't know — I shall love you wholly when we realise our dreams."

"That will be the Great Never Never," he replied tragically, "for when did man ever realise his dreams?"

The dressing gong sounded through the house. She rose and put out her hand.

"You must be patient with me, Roderick. Usually you understand so finely; can't you understand now?"

"I understand that you are a woman of an imperious will, to which it will always be my pride to bow," he responded.

There was no help for it. No more pleading could move her that afternoon. He had to take his leave. When the drawing-room door shut behind him, his expression changed,

and he descended the stairs cursing the Colony and all who were concerned therein. He went back to his club, dined, lost fifty pounds at cards, and went to bed morose and miserable.

The next morning he was greatly surprised by a visit from Sylvester. He was sitting in the well-lit corner room of his chambers, which he had converted into a studio, in front of the new picture he was painting from Ella's conception. His heart was not in it. No good could ever come from such tame propriety. And there he sat in an armchair, his legs extended compass-wise, glowering at the picture, when Sylvester came in.

"What fog has driven you here, camarado?" he cried. "You have arrived in season. This beastly world is standing on its head, and I don't know what to make of it. Sit down and have some absinthe, the only true comfort the devil has vouchsafed us."

He pointed to a glass of the opalescent liquid by his side. Sylvester declined the consolation.

"I want to have a little talk with you about your marriage," said he.

"Oh, damn my marriage!" exclaimed Roderick, irritably. "I tell you the idiot world is

gyrating indecently on its occiput; my engagement with the rest of things."

"Is it broken off?" inquired Sylvester, hopefully.

"The same thing. Postponed to the Millennium."

"The Colonial Millennium — ?"

"Yes. You are quite right, *fratello mio*, to keep clear of women and their works. No man can ever fathom their infinite incomprehensibility. Look here — " He rose and marched about the studio, burning with a sense of his wrongs and led by the instinct of his temperament to give vent to his grievances. "I love that girl with an imbecile passion. Art is great, but love is greater. I would make a holocaust of all that is dear to me in the world in the sacred name of Art. Am I not ready to expatriate myself? Have I not been working like Sisyphus for months? But I can't throw my elemental sex into the blaze. Six months' waiting is enough for all but anchorites. Do I look like an anchorite? I urge her to fix the marriage at Christmas. She 's as hard as your Philistine's head. We must wait until the Colony is a *fait accompli*. How is it going to be accomplished without money ?"

"I thought the scheme was getting along famously," interposed Sylvester.

"So did I, but it is n't. It has n't appealed to the imagination of this haggis-brained public, and so funds remain stationary. As if this worry and disappointment is n't enough for a man! *Point d'argent, point de Suisse.* No money, no colony. No colony, no marriage. The two things could never be connected save in the ineffable convolutions of the feminine brain."

"I see," said Sylvester. "It is hard lines on you."

He was intensely relieved by Roderick's confidences; could afford even to be magnanimous. Since his avowal to Ella of hostile intentions, he had felt it his duty to inform Roderick of his attitude. He had come this morning prepared to make a declaration of war. There were several little things he had learned incidentally of Roderick's past career, with which he had intended to confront him. The memory of Mr. Snodgrass informing the small boy that he was going to begin came into his mind as he mounted the stairs, and he smiled grimly. But, after all, no one had ever questioned the chivalry of Mr. Snodgrass's motives. His

first words on entering were an announcement of the object of his visit. Roderick had implicitly declared that object to be futile. To proceed further would be to attack a fallen man. To express satisfaction would be to triumph over a foe's discomfiture. He therefore expressed conventional sympathy. It was hard lines.

Roderick caught up the phrase and wove it into a fugue of indignant lamentation. Luck never came his way. The stars in their courses had fought against him since his cradle.

"Some men's touch turns everything to gold; mine to brass and deuced gimcrack brass at that. I've never loved a dear gazelle; but if I had, the disastrous animal would have got mange or delirium tremens and turned round and bitten me and given me hydrophobia. I suppose it's because of my general nefariousness. I wish I had been an austere embodiment of the seven deadly virtues like you, *amigo*. Then I should have waxed fat and prosperous. But there," he added, lighting a cigar, "that's enough. I don't know why I'm washing you in this torrent of my discontent."

"If it has done you any good, I am not sorry to have heard it," said Sylvester. "As for the Colony, I never did think much of the idea, you know. It is outside the sphere of practical affairs altogether. Besides, you could never stay more than a month away from Piccadilly."

"It meant a means of livelihood for this profitless child of nature, anyway," said Roderick, watching the wreaths of his cigar-smoke.

"Pardon me if I take a liberty," said Sylvester, "but I was under the impression that your father made you a good allowance."

Roderick stared at him for a moment and then laughed loud.

"You don't know Usher senior. How much the old man has, or where the devil it all came from, I have no idea; but I don't get any of it. And when he descends to realms below, he 'll bequeath it all to a home for decayed postage-stamp collectors. No; I get what I earn. The Colony was a fixed income."

"Well, you 'll have to settle down to something else," said Sylvester, consolingly.

"And meanwhile you can go and persuade our fair enthusiast that the Colony is all a fizzle

and that she must shed happiness upon the head of your devoted friend at Christmas!"

"I don't think I can do that," said Sylvester, drily. He pulled out his watch, announced his departure. Roderick shook his hand effusively.

"But, by the way," said he, "you have n't told me what you came for — my marriage — ?"

"Oh, after what you 've said about the matter that can wait," replied Sylvester, hurriedly, and he left his friend to his artistic solitude.

Roderick felt somewhat ashamed and somewhat relieved after his burst of confidence. To cry defeat after the first reverse seemed the part of a craven. Thus were women not won. He determined to return to the attack, to choose his time more wisely. A week later he caught Ella in a brighter mood. He had exerted himself to please, to kindle her enthusiasms, which shone from cheeks and eyes. He struck the personal chord, watched eagerly, seemed to perceive it vibrate through her. Then he urged once more. She changed suddenly, held out a warning hand.

"Not that again, Roderick," she said. "You must not make me dread your coming.

Some women yield to insistence; it only hardens me. I thought you knew me better."

"Then the Colony shall start at Christmas; I swear it," he cried magniloquently, and the remainder of the interview flowed more smoothly.

It is all very well to command events. But whether they will obey is a different matter. During the last few weeks Roderick had succeeded in his design to quash the Colony in so far as to alienate several hesitating supporters. To win these back was no easy matter. Moreover, his old power of persuasion seemed to have failed him. There was a period when he had deluded himself into the belief that the Colony was a practicable scheme. But the moment it had appeared contrary to his own interest and he had regarded it dispassionately, he despised it from the depths of his soul as an inane chimera. To have to simulate a burnt out enthusiasm was irksome; he failed to carry conviction. And meanwhile he was a prey to gnawing anxiety. How was he to replace the three thousand pounds? He anathematised the feminine temperament.

The feminine temperament, however, was not in that state of dispassionate, yet unreason-

ing decision in which he imagined it to be. These were unhappy days for Ella. She seemed to have become to herself a vague entity wandering in a land of shadows, forced by some unknown power therein to wander, and finding her only hope of salvation in one elusive light that gleamed fitfully in the distance. Her aunt, being a practical woman, was quick to notice the habitual contraction of her brow and the wearied preoccupation in her eyes. Nowadays she openly mocked at the Colony. On such occasions Ella fired up, defended it with the fierceness of a forlorn hope. Lady Milmo was puzzled. She even went the length of consulting Sylvester, surprising him considerably by a morning call in Weymouth Street.

"The Colony's a fraud, and she knows it's a fraud," she said, in the vernacular of her class. "And yet she pins her immortal soul to it. Why does n't she marry the man and be done with it? But no — she won't do that. She's making herself ill because the Colony is n't likely to come off, which is distinctly good business, and what on earth she can find to interest her in the rubbishy scheme, goodness only knows. If she only painted, or

wrote poetry, or out-Wagnered Wagner in immortal tunelessness, one could perhaps understand. But she's no more artistic than you are."

"I know I'm a Philistine," smiled Sylvester, at the tribute of the artless lady. "Is that why you've come to me?"

"Oh, you know what I mean," returned Lady Milmo. "Now can't you put some sense into her, or get that dear Mr. Lanyon to do so? It's my impression she isn't in love with him one little bit."

"Then, for Heaven's sake, my dear Lady Milmo," said Sylvester, earnestly, "do all you can to impress that fact upon him!"

"I should be glad if the engagement were broken off," said Lady Milmo, reflectively.

"So would all the true friends of Ella Defries," replied Sylvester.

Lady Milmo arched her eyebrows. She looked at him for a moment quizzically.

"Is that purely a disinterested remark, Dr. Lanyon?"

"I would not marry one single woman that is now living on this earth," said Sylvester.

"Why, whatever have we poor creatures done to you? There are some men, I know,

who look upon women as a disease, but I 'm sure you 're not one."

Sylvester scanned his finger nails, — a trick he had caught from his father.

"One marriage is enough for a man, Lady Milmo," he said in a low voice.

Lady Milmo was conscious of an indiscretion. She escaped adroitly and led the talk back to Roderick.

"I think we 'd better get this silly affair of Ella's broken off, don't you?" she said at parting.

"If you could manage it, my father and myself would be exceedingly grateful to you," he replied.

Lady Milmo was driving away, her kind head filled with schemes for Ella's extrication, when, at the block at Oxford Circus, she caught sight of a news-vendor wearing as an apron the coloured bill of an early edition of an evening paper. Across it in enormous capitals ran the startling legend, "Sudden Death of Sir Decimus Bland."

"The best thing the pompous old idiot has ever done in his life!" said Lady Milmo.

CHAPTER XIII

THE USES OF ADVERSITY

It was the music-room in Mr. Bevis Urquhart's mansion in Park Street. The floor was polished, the walls panelled in white and gold, the ceiling painted in the Watteau style. About forty fashionably dressed people sat on gilded chairs in the body of the room. High in front of them towered the organ; beneath it stretched a low platform containing a white and gold grand piano pushed into a corner, and a Louis XV. table, at which sat half a dozen men. Among these was Roderick, looking worn and jaded, and from the front row of the chairs Ella Defries viewed him in some concern. The committee of the Walden Art Colony had called a general meeting of those interested in the project, and Mr. Bevis Urquhart had lent his music-room for the purpose.

Mr. Redmayne, R. A., had been voted into the chair. He was a business-like looking little man, clean-shaven and precise in attire,

and he spoke in a dry, sharp way like a barrister. He announced to the meeting what Roderick had heard some days before, — that Sir Decimus Bland had died suddenly and had made no testamentary provision for the Colony. They all had looked to him for the payment of the Director's salary and for the guaranteeing of any pecuniary deficit that might occur in working the concern. Their chief support gone, it was for the meeting to decide whether the scheme should be continued or abandoned. From a memorandum supplied by Roderick he read a statement of accounts. Three thousand and twenty pounds at Mr. Usher's bankers; two thousand promised. Was there any person or combination of persons willing to fill Sir Decimus Bland's place? He sat down. No one responded. Lord Eglington, a withered gentleman with a cracked voice, rose from the committee table, and after expounding the aim of the Colony regretfully proposed the entire abandonment of the scheme. Mr. Bevis Urquhart seconded the resolution.

Roderick caught an appealing glance from Ella and sprang to his feet. He pleaded eloquently. He had worked with heart and soul

to organise the Colony; was ready to devote his existence to it. The future of Art was at stake. Here was the one glorious chance the century had offered to free Art from the shackles that had degraded it and through its inexorable influence had degraded modern life. Never had he felt such pain as when he had heard Lord Eglington and Mr. Urquhart propose to dismiss the scheme to that unutterable horror of desolation, the limbo of forsaken ideals. He adjured them to weigh the vast responsibility they had taken upon themselves. He urged those present to respond generously to his appeal for funds to carry on the work.

"I speak as a man," said he, "fighting for dear life, for all that is sacred and holy to me in existence. I have pledged myself to bring this boon upon the world, and I will do it ere I die."

He sat down, flushed and excited. The company, moved by his enthusiasm, applauded encouragingly. Ella rose.

"It will be a disgrace to us all if the motion is carried," she said, turning round to the general body. "Let us fill up a subscription list now. I will head it with five thousand pounds." She sat down. There was a cold

silence. Her heart sank with a feeling of shame at her outburst. *Qui m'aime me suive* is sometimes an excellent battle-cry. When no one follows, it falls deadly flat. She realised that most of the people there knew her personal interest in the affair, and her cheek grew hotter. Roderick stepped boldly down to her, and whispered in her ear.

"You have the worshipping gratitude of all my life," said he.

A man rose at the back of the room and began to speak. There was a rustle of garments as every one turned to look at him. He was a well-known journalist, the editor of a weekly paper that made a specialty of diagnosing unsound institutions. Roderick tugged at his Vandyke beard and watched him narrowly. He began in a light bantering tone, described with delicate satiric touch the objects of the Colony. Then he playfully analysed the idyllic conditions under which the colonists would work. The meeting laughed. He sketched the boredom, the universal hatred of the minor poet who insisted on reading his poems aloud to the assembled Colony, the flirtations, imbroglios, jealousies, the lady who paid nothing and went about declar-

ing that the food was not fit to eat. One by one he touched off the types. The meeting was delighted. Then the speaker launched out into a trenchant indictment of the whole scheme, disclosed its absurdity, its financial rottenness, its infinite futility. He ended amid rounds of laughter and applause. Ridicule had killed the scheme outright. There were cries that the motion should be put. It was carried almost by acclamation. Thus ended the great Walden Art Colony.

"I did think you would stand by it, Urquhart," said Roderick to the young semi-millionaire.

The people were begining to disperse, among much laughter and gossip. Ella had lingered on an imploring sign from Roderick. Urquhart stifled a yawn and buttoned his frock-coat.

"My dear fellow," said he, from the heights of his superior culture, "if you would only study Pradovitch, — the one genius this century has produced, — study him as I have done, you would not fail to be convinced that Art is the leprosy of life."

For once Roderick lost his temper. An evil look came into his face.

"What a God-forsaken fool you are!" he snarled out. And turning on his heel he joined Ella.

The young man turned to Lord Eglington.

"That's the worst of having to do with such *canaille*," he said languidly. But in spite of his assumption of supercilious indifference, his face wore a malignant expression as he watched Roderick and his companion disappear through the doorway. At the door, however, Roderick's indignation evaporated. It is no doubt an immense satisfaction to tell a posturing imbecile exactly what you think of him, but when you have misappropriated a couple of thousands of that imbecile's money without any reasonable prospect of restoring it, the satisfaction is apt to be short lived.

Roderick and Ella gained the street without saying a word. A cab sauntered up.

"Will you —?" began Roderick.

"I would sooner walk part of the way. Do you mind?"

"Delighted," said Roderick.

"The room was so hot," she explained, "and it is a beautiful afternoon."

They walked down Park Lane in silence, hanging dejected heads, a new Adam and Eve

driven from Eden. Now and then she glanced sideways at him, to see his brow set and deep lines descending parallel with his moustache and losing themselves in his beard. His defeat seemed to have crushed him. Ella felt a pang of pity. She touched his arm lightly.

"You must not take it too much to heart," she said.

"I must," he replied, with a gesture of despair. "To think it should have all gone down like a house of cards!"

They crossed the road and entered the Park. The grey mists of the early December afternoon were beginning to gather among the trees. Far off a great crimson blur announced the setting sun. To their right the statue of Achilles loomed grimly on its deserted hillock. Roderick pointed to it with his stick.

"Do you remember that Sunday afternoon six months ago, when all was hope and sunshine?"

"Redmayne had just joined," she remarked.

"And to-day he took the chair, so as to crush us. They had it all arranged beforehand. A damnable conspiracy! And we were powerless. It maddens me!"

His tones were those of intense feeling Ella was compelled to comfort.

"You fought splendidly," she said. "A man can't do more."

He stopped abruptly in the path and laid both hands on her wrists by her muff. A belated nursery maid wheeling a perambulator eyed them dully.

"Bless you for the words! You cannot tell what your sympathy means to me now."

By a happy chance he had struck the right note. Tears came into the girl's eyes. For the first time she was able to disassociate the man from his work. She lost her own sense of disappointment in womanly pity for the man who had been defeated while battling against great odds.

"And bless you for the tears standing in those eyes!" said Roderick.

They walked on. Somehow her hand found its way beneath his arm. They spoke but little. Roderick's pulses fluttered with a new hope; but his perceptions into the nature of women were too keen to allow him to force an advantage. He wore his stricken air, yet subtly conveyed to her the deep comfort of her sympathy. He pressed her hand against his side

and left her to work out the situation for herself under these excellent conditions.

Ella had never felt so near him. The unity in their golden dreams had not bound them so closely as this unity in catastrophe. For even when the dreams were most golden, she had haunting misgivings that they were but visions. Outraged by Sylvester's trampling on her heart, sickened at herself by her year's reckless follies, eager, with all a proud girl's passion, to vindicate herself, to follow some noble standard, she had caught at the first that flaunted by and compelled herself imperiously to believe in it. This forced faith had been the strenuous labour of her inner life. She had armed herself in triple brass against Lady Milmo's shafts of flippant satire, against Matthew Lanyon's kindly wisdom, against her own common sense. The Colony would be merely a paradise of cranks. No serious artist would throw away his or her career in such a Cloud-cuckoo-land. She herself, at the best but a well-taught amateur painter in water-colours, what was she doing in that galley? She set aside reason. To believe in Roderick, she must believe in the Colony. To believe in the Colony, she must believe in Roderick. The two

were inextricably interfused. Realisation of the dreams was her only justification for marrying the man. The man's personality and enthusiasm for an ideal had overpowered her. She would not think. She was young, inexperienced, warm-natured, seeing things out of proportion. Flight from the self she had deemed dishonoured was her only chance of salvation; and she mistook the imaginary cries behind her, hounding her onward, for the voice of inexorable necessity. If Roderick could accomplish it, the Colony was a glorious thing. The Colony accomplished, Roderick was the conqueror to whom she must yield. When the dreams were most golden she saw him such, and they were near together.

But then had come the days of Roderick's loss of interest in the scheme. He put her above the Colony, desired her above all things. She shivered back. For himself alone she could not marry him. Why, she could not tell. A girl with a mind pure and sweet does not speculate on that which, traced logically to its source, is simply elemental sexual repulsion. She clung fiercely to her point. Then Roderick returned to the scheme with his old

ardour. In her heart she believed him passionately sincere. Misfortune had come with terrible unexpectedness. He had fought and failed. He was a beaten man. The dream had been brutally proved to have been the emptiest of hallucinations. She was miserably cast down. Roderick seemed broken-hearted. They were at one in an absolute cynical reality. Both had been pierced by the same shaft. The doors of the cranks' Eden had clanged behind them, and they were walking together in the grey, dreary expanse of Hyde Park, with an unknown world of the most definite prose before them. They seemed alone, to have nothing in common with the rest of society; to have in common with each other this all-filling humiliation of defeat. So when he spoke, the unreasoning woman leaped to comfort the man. She had never felt so near him. A great and natural revulsion of feeling had lifted her heart to consolation.

They quitted the Park at Hyde Park Corner, and paused by common impulse.

"I suppose you will take a cab now," he said reluctantly.

"I suppose I must," she said in the same

tone. "I would ask you to come with me, but it's auntie's day at home, and the place will be full of chattering people."

"I can't bear leaving you," said he.

"Nor I you."

"You look tired, poor child. Let me give you some tea. Will you? I belong to a club in Piccadilly, — the Hyde Park, where ladies are admitted to tea. It is the home of all the depressed outcasts of London, and even they shun it. We are sure to be alone in the tea-room. Come."

He hailed a hansom. Ella, in that strange mood of passivity which is woman's fatalest, entered without remark. He followed, and they drove to the Hyde Park Club.

As he had prophesied, the tea-room was empty, save for one dejected member with his neck-tie riding over the back of his collar, who stared at them for a moment and then passed out like a ghost. A blazing fire, however, was burning in the grate, and the maroon leather chairs and divans added a sense of warmth and comfort to the room. The despondent ones took their seats in a little recess by the fireplace, and Roderick ordered tea.

"It's a new club, and no two members are

acquainted. It is the most desolate place in London. A man comes here when he wants to work out his suicide. There 's no one to distract his thoughts. Then he goes out and commits it."

"Why did you join?" asked Ella, mechanically.

"Perhaps I foresaw this day. If your worshipped dearness had not waited for me at Urquhart's, I should have come here — and God knows what desperate remedies I should have brooded over. But I never foresaw having you here to strengthen me. Thank Heaven I did join, so as to have a haven of rest and quietude to bring you to."

He passed his hand across his forehead wearily, and rested his elbow on the little table in front of him.

"My God!" he said. "It has been a bitter day for me."

The waiter brought a tray with tea and delicately baked scones. Ella filled the cups and tried to cheer her companion, praising the tea and the arrangements of the club. The warmth, the little sense of novelty, working an unconscious influence, had brought back

animation to her face. She looked very fresh and winsome in the man's eyes. They fixed themselves upon her despairingly. Ella suddenly broke off her trivial chatter.

"Ah you must not," she said, with a little choke to keep down the tears. "There are so many great things left in the world to fight for—. Oh, I wish I could help you!"

"Bless you!" he replied solemnly—and how much was acting and how much was genuine, the man's Maker alone could tell, for the man himself could not; "there is only one way in which you could help me, and that must not be. You are rich, I am poor. We are no longer working in the great common cause in which all such differences could have been sunk. As a man of honour I must release you from your engagement with me, for the conditions on which our engagement was based have lapsed. You are quite free, Ella, and I must go my way alone."

He hid his face in his hands. Ella trifled with her tea-spoon.

"You are generous," she said in a low voice. "But if your honour is at stake, so is mine.

I could not turn away from you in your hour of need."

"I am a defeated man," he replied brokenly. "You would despise me."

The word pierced her like a knife. At that moment she was noble, with the blind and piteous folly that is so often at the heart of woman's nobility. She drew herself up proudly, then stretched her arm impulsively across the table and closed her fresh young fingers on his hand.

"I will marry you whenever you please, and we will face the world together and begin a new life," she said.

"My poor dear child," said Lady Milmo, kissing Ella affectionately, when she came home, "I am so sorry for you. Lady Elstree came here straight after the meeting and told us all about it. But it was bound to come to smash, darling."

"I suppose it was, auntie," replied Ella, taking off her fur necklet.

She sat down on the fender stool and looked into the fire. Lady Milmo came up and took one of her hands and petted it in her kindly fashion.

"I 'm very glad it 's all over," she said. "As soon as it became serious, I never liked it, you know, dear. And now we can start everything quite fresh, can't we?"

"Yes, quite fresh," assented Ella.

"You see now," continued Lady Milmo, "how wise it was to make that condition about your engagement. I don't want to say anything against Roderick, but he 's an impossible visionary, dear. I always hated the idea of your marrying him. It is all broken off now, is n't it?"

To Lady Milmo's great astonishment, the girl suddenly burst into a fit of miserable crying. She knelt by her and petted her comfortingly.

"It will be quite easy, my child. I will write him a kind little note about it, and you can go down to Ayresford and take care of that dear Uncle Matthew of yours."

"Oh, auntie," cried Ella at last, "you don't understand. I promised Roderick this afternoon to marry him in a fortnight's time."

CHAPTER XIV

AT AYRESFORD

WHILST the meeting was taking place that brought the Walden Art Colony to ludicrous collapse, Sylvester was on his way to Ayresford to pay one of his periodical Saturday to Monday visits. Matthew, with Dorothy clinging to his finger, met him at the station. Sylvester took the child up in his arms and kissed her, striving hard to respond to her demonstrations of affection. But his heart had turned from her. She was the embodiment of a perpetual pain.

Sylvester's bag being taken in charge by the gardener's boy, the trio walked up to the house, Dorothy skipping between them. The old man looked proudly and lovingly down at her. Sylvester caught the glance from time to time, and a pang queerly like jealousy passed through him. If only he could love the small thing as he had loved her two years ago! But it was impossible. It was a question of

blood instinct; she came of an alien race. He passed the house where he had lived with Constance, where Frank Leroux had died after the confession of his miserable secret. To the man's gloomy fancy it appeared a lie in brick. Only when he found himself alone with his father in the familiar library did he put away these imaginings and wear a clearer brow.

"I hope the marriage is as far off as ever," said Matthew, warming his hands before the fire. Sylvester laughed.

"It seems to be postponed to the Greek Kalends. She won't marry until he takes her to this Colony in the air — and that will be never. The whole thing will die a natural death."

"I hope so indeed," replied Matthew, reflectively. "She ought to marry a better man."

He glanced involuntarily at his son, and their eyes met, and each saw that the other understood the reference.

"I know you wanted me to marry her," said Sylvester, awkwardly. "I could n't. I 'm sorry."

Matthew raised his hand, as if about to

speak; but the habit of reserve held him back. A word might have unlocked the son's heart, but the word remained unspoken. Sylvester dismissed the subject by saying in a lighter manner, —

"It's none of my business, but I often wonder what Roderick lives on."

"He is an artist and a literary man. I suppose he sells his wares," said Matthew.

"Possibly he does. In fact, I suppose he must. I always was under the impression that his father made him a handsome allowance."

"Usher allows him a few hundreds a year," said the old man, in a matter-of-fact tone.

"Apparently we are both wrong, then. Usher has n't allowed him a penny for years. Roderick told me so himself."

Matthew started in his chair, and his face wore an expression of great anxiety.

"Impossible!" he said almost angrily.

"I only quote Roderick's explicit statement. And I fancy for once in a way he was n't lying."

Then he saw his father white and aged, his kind lips quivering, his breath coming fast. In concern he rose, bent over him.

"Why, you 're ill — " he began.

But Matthew pushed him away gently.

"Nonsense, my boy. It's only one of those confounded pains about my heart. There, it 's all gone now. Don't worry. It 's this hot room. I think I 'll go out for a stroll."

"You had better lie down," said the physician.

"Yes, and stick out my tongue and chew that thermometer of yours! No, thank you. There!" He rose to his feet, and held himself erect. "I 'm as strong as a horse."

"I don't like your going out," said Sylvester.

The other looked at his watch. "I must, for a bit," he said. "Go up and talk to your aunt for an hour before dinner. She 's dying to hear all the gossip."

It was useless to try to restrain him. He had an imperious will to which Sylvester had yielded all his life. So the son went upstairs, and the father put on his overcoat and walked at a brisk pace through the dark December evening to the house of his enemy.

Mr. Usher put down the "Financial News" and rose from his chair as Matthew entered the room.

"My dear friend, how great a surprise! You have come for a reconciliation. It is a Christian thing. I too am a Christian, Matthew."

"I have come to ask you a question," said Matthew, ignoring the other's proffered hand. "Roderick denies that he receives any allowance from you. Is that true?"

"I am too poor to make my son an allowance," replied Usher.

"You know what I mean," replied Matthew, sternly. "I pay £100 a quarter into your banking account for you to remit, as from yourself, to Roderick. Does he get it?"

Usher's eyes shifted from Matthew's glance. He shuffled a step towards the fireplace before replying.

"You outrage a father's feelings, Matthew. I live for my son. You yourself have a son."

Matthew strode up to him and laid a hand on his collar.

"Confound it, sir, answer my question! Roderick states that he has n't received a penny from you for years. Have you kept all these sums back from him? By God! you shall speak."

Involuntarily he shook him in his angry grasp. Usher was scared.

"No violence, Matthew."

Matthew released him with a contemptuous exclamation.

"I see by your face you have kept the money. I was a fool to trust you. You 're an infernal mean-spirited hound. I 've known that for years. But I never thought you would rob your son."

"He 's not your son — At least," he added with an ugly smile, "I presume not. I have trained him as I have thought judicious. I am a judicious man."

"You 're a damned thief," said Matthew.

Usher waved his hand towards the door.

"I think you had better go. I do not like to see an old man so carried away by passion. It will shorten your life. I am always calm."

Matthew regarded him for a moment, astounded. Then he spoke in blazing anger:

"*You* show *me* the door? *You?* Sit down in that chair at once." Usher obeyed. "There! I stay in this house as long as I choose. It is mine, — everything in it paid for with my heart's blood. By God, if we were younger men, I should thrash you within an ace of

your life! Now then — let me see your pass-books for the last six years. Give them to me at once, I say."

Instinctively Usher shrank before Matthew's tone of authority. He rose, whimpering allusions to his own poverty and Matthew's domineering ways, and extracted a set of vellum-covered books from a safe in a corner of the room. Matthew threw his hat and stick upon a chair, and sat down by the round table on which Usher had laid the books. The latter resumed his armchair on the opposite side and watched him furtively as he scanned the pages with practised eye and bent brows. When Matthew was dangerous, he had no power to resist. The craven within him yielded to the stronger personality. But he hated Matthew with a deadlier hatred. Even now, in the moment of his humiliation, there was a gleam in his eyes of a revengeful joy at the imperious man's discovery of the manner in which he had been fooled for years past. He rubbed his palms softly together beneath the level of the table.

There was a dead silence, broken only by the faint rustling of the leaves as Matthew turned them over. At last, when he had

looked through the books, he rose and returned his glasses to their little leather case. His face was gray and peaked. There on the table lay incontrovertible proof that his life's atonement had been frustrated, that instead of smoothing Roderick's path, he had merely been pandering to Usher's senile vices. A whole fortune had gone in insane speculations, rotten companies for the exploitation of imaginary mines, futile inventions, wild-cat schemes. Here and there were amounts for £100, £200, paid to names which he recognised as those of great postage-stamp dealers. Not once had a cheque been drawn payable to Roderick. On the credit side were two large sums which he himself had paid to extricate Roderick from special difficulties. On the debit side was nothing to correspond. He felt stricken with sudden age. But he drew himself up haughtily lest Usher should see his despair.

"And you have been lying, I perceive," said he, "when you have come to me for money to pay Roderick's debts, — or else you have n't paid them."

"I have paid them all — all his debts — with securities, Matthew. That is why nothing is in my pass-book."

Matthew shrugged his shoulders contemptuously.

"Your word is about as good as your bond," he said, taking up his hat and stick.

Usher rose and leaned his hands on the table and regarded him reproachfully, wagging his head.

"I could not blacken the character of my only son, Matthew. He has been wild, but I have a parent's love. Why should I give him £400 a year when he did not need it? But when he has come to me in distress, I have relieved his necessities."

"I have learned all I wanted to know," said Matthew. "Good-night to you." And he strode out of the room.

An hour or two later he was sitting alone with Sylvester over their wine, in the comfortable dining-room, as he had done so many, many times before, — and the same silence reigned between them. He lay back in his chair and watched his son, whose face was turned from him in half profile. He wondered what were the thoughts that held him so serious, as he gazed into the fire. It was a man's face, marked with the cares of life, the responsibilities of an anxious profession; proud, re-

served, and intellectual. Matthew was immensely proud of him. In this hour of relaxed moral fibre, he was humbly grateful, wondered what pleasure a brilliant man like Sylvester could find in the company of a dull old country lawyer. It was only the love between them. His heart warmed towards his son, and a foolish moisture gathered in his eyes. And then, almost suddenly, came a great longing to tell Sylvester all. He was a physician, accustomed to view the dark places in the human soul. If only he could tell him, share with him the burden he had borne for so many years! It would no longer be a burden. He would face the world at last, a free man. For otherwise what would be the end? He himself was on the verge of ruin. He might spit upon Usher's gaberdine, but Usher's demands must be met. How to meet them and preserve an inheritance for Sylvester? And Roderick? He felt crushed by this evening's revelations. He had struggled as few men have struggled to make atonement. It had been in vain. He had no longer the strength to make fresh effort. A word to Sylvester, and peace would possess his soul.

Sylvester glanced round and saw his father's

eyes fixed upon him with a strange yearning. He rose, went up to his chair, and laid a hand upon his shoulder.

"What can I do for you?" he asked, with more tenderness than usual in his tone.

"Think well of me when I am gone, Syl," said the old man. Sylvester grasped his shoulder a little tighter.

"That's a strange thing to ask me," he said. "You know what I think of you. And for God's sake don't talk of the other matter."

He moved away and struck a match to relight his cigar, which had gone out during his reverie. Matthew was silent for a few seconds.

"Suppose," he said at last, "that any one you loved and thought the world of had done you a great wrong and had kept it hidden from you?"

Sylvester started, and his face grew suddenly pale. Did his father know? The old pain returned. He stood staring at the back of his father's chair. The match burned itself out between his fingers. His voice trembled as he spoke.

"There are some sins that are unforgivable. We need n't discuss them."

It was Matthew's turn to start and look round at his son in anxious surmise.

"You are of course speaking of the matter in the abstract?" he said.

Sylvester struck another match, and spoke between the first few whiffs of his cigar.

"Yes. In the abstract. There is the woman, for instance, who betrays her husband, whose life is a horrible lie. To say to a man 'forgive,' is vain breath. I know men who say they have forgiven. They are almost as contemptible as their wives."

"You would not forgive, Syl?" said Matthew, gravely.

"By God, no!" said Sylvester.

"You are right, my boy," said Matthew. "We had better not pursue the subject. Abstract ethics are unprofitable matter for discussion."

He smiled in his kindly way and settled himself comfortably in his chair. But his heart was twenty-fold heavier than before. He closed his eyes. The memory came vividly of a woman throwing herself on her knees before him, in that very room, several years ago, and pouring out to him the agony of her soul. He had listened, questioned, bidden her go and sin no more. For Sylvester's sake he had

counselled silence, secret atonement. It had been unutterable comfort to him that Sylvester's happiness had been untouched. And now, in spite of all, Sylvester knew. Else why should Sylvester have spoken thus of the faithless wife? The vague conjecture that had haunted him for nearly two years shaped itself into certainty. Many things that had been dark in Sylvester's recent life now became clear. But how he must have suffered! None knew better than he. For a while he forgot his own burden. Then suddenly the memory returned. But no longer had he the desire to share it with Sylvester. It was more imperative than ever to keep the secret undivulged. It was no new thing for him to struggle and endure. And the man of iron purpose and pathetic tenderness felt ashamed of his former impulse.

"I'm afraid we've been talking a pack of nonsense, Syl," he said lightly.

"And we're both old enough to know better," replied Sylvester, with a laugh. "How did we get on to the subject?"

"I began to croak in an absurd way."

"And I'm afraid I helped you. I must come down here oftener. That dingy old house of mine is getting on my nerves."

"Oh, bosh!" said the old man, "you and I don't believe in nerves. We leave that to the feeble folk."

"Well, I have n't got many, I must confess," said Sylvester, drawing up his well-knit figure. "And as a matter of fact, except your seediness, I have n't a care in the whole wide world."

"Neither have I," returned Matthew, briskly. "And as for my health, I 'm as fit as ever I was. Oh, I know I can't live for ever, but I 'm good for another ten years at least."

"You 've got to be careful and do what you 're told," said the physician.

"Let 's have another glass of port before we go up to Agatha," said Matthew, reaching out for the decanter.

Thus father and son tried to throw dust into each other's eyes, so that each should regard the other as the happiest of men.

The servant entered, bearing a tray with the letters that had arrived by the evening post. Matthew glanced at the addresses.

"Will you excuse me?" he said courteously. And Sylvester, trained in a brusquer school of manners, felt a great respect for his father's old-world politeness to a guest. Matthew opened

two envelopes and glanced cursorily at their contents. Over the third letter he paused, and his lips twitched as he read. Then without comment he handed it to Sylvester.

It was a long letter from Ella, written that morning. Amid many feminine explanations and ambiguities she announced the fact of the downfall of the Walden Art Colony and her marriage with Roderick in a fortnight's time.

"This upsets all my calculations," said Sylvester, gravely. "I thought the affair was as good as broken off."

"It is only natural," said Matthew.

"Natural! How?"

"The chivalry of woman, Syl."

Respect kept Sylvester from contradiction, but his lips curled somewhat ironically.

"If a woman won't have a man when he is up, will she rush into his arms when he is down?"

"It often happens, my boy," replied the old man.

Sylvester took one or two turns about the room. Then he paused by the table and lifted his wine-glass.

"Here's to our friend Roderick's confu-

sion," said he. "I 'm afraid I have been slack in carrying out your wishes, but now I 'll use every means in my power to stop the marriage."

Matthew deliberately set down the glass which he happened to be holding in his hand, and remained for a moment in deep thought. Then he spoke.

"I can't drink a toast like that, nor must you. I release you entirely from your promise. I have reason to believe I may have misjudged Roderick, and I have no right to interfere. It is my wish that the marriage should take place."

This was final. Sylvester made an Englishman's awkward little bow of acquiescence.

"I have no personal feelings in the matter, as you are aware," said he. "On the other hand, if Roderick should be proved to be — well, as undesirable as you thought, it would be wise to let Ella know, I suppose?"

"I would not have her marry a scamp," replied Matthew, in a low voice. "It would break my heart. But, O God! Syl, what is a scamp? Which of us dare judge his fellow?"

He was feeling utterly weary, and from his prostration came the personal utterance which his ordinary strength rigidly restrained. Syl-

vester, unaware of the stirring of great depths, replied coldly, —

"A man with a clean record behind him, like either of us, is certainly in a position to judge."

"And pity?"

"Pity generally seems to be an elegant method of condoning those offences which one has in common with the person pitied," replied Sylvester.

"So that when you are stainless you are pitiless?"

"In the sense of sympathising with evil in any form — yes."

"Well," said the old man, throwing himself back in his chair and covering his eyes with his hand, "thank God there's still some sin left in the world to keep it sweet!"

CHAPTER XV

A STRIP OF PINK PAPER

A FEW days afterwards Sylvester received an invitation to the wedding, accompanied by a despairing note from Lady Milmo. Ella *would* do it, and who could prevent her? When a woman was *bent* on a thing, especially *matrimony*, no mule in the world was so *obstinate*. Lady Milmo italicised freely, "obstinate" being doubly underlined. She hoped, however, that the lovers would be happy, explained that the wedding would be as quiet as her enormous circle of acquaintance would allow, and besought Sylvester to come and support her as the only soul that sympathised with her in this disastrous occurrence. Sylvester read the letter through somewhat grimly. Then he glanced at the silver-printed card. The conjuncture of the names caused him a sudden feeling of repugnance, and with an impulse he did not seek to explain, he threw the card into the fire. As for the invitation, he declined it on the

score of professional engagements; also because he disapproved of marriage in the abstract. If all the race for one generation, he wrote, passed a self-denying ordinance of celibacy, there would be an end of this miserable thing that was called humanity.

On receipt of this letter, Lady Milmo smiled astutely and took advantage of a confidential hour before bedtime to tread upon delicate ground.

"I shall always wonder why you refused Sylvester Lanyon, Ella," she said meditatively.

The blood flew angrily into Ella's cheeks, and she turned away her head.

"I never refused him because he never did me the honour to ask me to marry him."

"Perhaps he needed a little encouragement, dear," said Lady Milmo, somewhat taken aback.

"He needs a lot to make a man of him that only his Maker could give him," replied Ella, turning round vindictively. "His blood is a kind of Condy's Fluid, and his heart is a glass retort. He's just a piece of sentient mechanism. How do you think a man like that could ask a girl to marry him?"

"Well, he did once," murmured Lady Milmo.

"He was different then," said Ella, with a queer little shock of pain. "I used to like him. But now—now there is no one in the whole wide world I dislike so much. Sometimes when he comes here and talks to me in that cold, emotionless voice of his, I absolutely hate him. And if it was n't for my dear old Uncle Matthew—" she broke off and rang the bell for her maid. "It's about time to go to bed, auntie."

Lady Milmo made no response. A flash of the truth occurred to her; but the whole matter of Ella's state of mind was very complicated. She yawned behind gracefully lifted fingers.

"I think so too, my dear," she said.

They bade each other good-night, and Ella fell asleep while cataloguing the infirmities of the man whom she was not about to marry.

The man whom she was to marry in ten days' time was meanwhile passing through a period of sweet delight alternating with the most poignant anxiety. Ready money for the ordinary expenses of the wedding he had in plenty. Some overdue royalties on prints from a couple of pictures came in most opportunely, and these, added to an advance made by a friendly editor for whose weekly he wrote the art article,

put him beyond the fear of embarrassment. But the thought of the £3,000 which he could not restore, haunted him night and day. Urquhart had twice asked casually for a cheque for the amount of his deposit, and he had promised in his off-hand way. A third demand had been made somewhat threateningly; he had laughed airily, apologised for his forgetfulness, and undertaken to send him a cheque for £2,000 by return of post. After that Roderick avoided his club and the haunts where he was likely to meet Urquhart.

That was three days ago. Roderick hoped that Urquhart would not renew his request till after his marriage. Then he could obtain a large sum from Ella, who would be no longer under Matthew Lanyon's trusteeship, but would be free to dispose of her money as she chose. Besides, no man would pester another for money during his honeymoon. He would have ample time to arrange things. He had been rather sore at Matthew's absolute refusal to allow Ella to make any marriage settlements. Not that he had taken the initiative in the matter. Matthew himself had done so, in a friendly letter in which he referred to the greater dignity and feeling of

independence of the man upon whom none of his wife's fortune had been settled. Roderick had acquiesced with good grace, and in his heart wished that he really possessed the delicacy of sentiment that would have made his deprecation of such things as marriage settlements genuine. For he had grown to love Ella genuinely, and he hated himself for counting on her money.

"Just one week more, dear, and then we shall begin our new life together." So ran a sentence of a letter from Ella, which Roderick was reading at breakfast. He sighed, rested his elbows on the table and his chin in his hands, his yellow beard protruding over his fingers, and gazed sadly over the elegantly set meal. Their new life! He was past forty, past the age of fresh ideals. Hitherto his had been the gratification of the lust of the eyes and the lust of the flesh. At times he deceived himself, an exuberant mood carrying its own persuasiveness. But there were hours, and they had been very frequent of late, when he saw himself as he was and hated the picture. A *poseur*, a sham, a creature of imperfect moral sense; gifted, it is true, with certain artistic faculties, wherewith he imposed

upon a superficial world and so made his living; but insincere, devoid of real enthusiasms, cynically despising the gospel that he preached. For the first time he had touched a fervent and earnest soul, and the sense of his responsibility overwhelmed him. He rose and looked into the Empire mirror over the fireplace. He was middle-aged, puffed, wrinkled, worn out. There could be no new ideals, — only a reattiring of the old shams that had peopled his life. He threw himself down in an armchair and read Ella's letter through again.

"My God," said he, from his heart, as a million futile men have said, "if only I had ordered my life differently!"

A trim maid-servant, one of the staff of the mansions in which his chambers were situated, entered with the announcement of a visitor. A moment afterwards Bevis Urquhart came in, languid, supercilious, with an ugly expression on his flabby face. Roderick rose, assumed at once his jaunty manner.

"Sit down, my dear friend. You come like a ray of morning sunshine piercing through the fog."

Urquhart put his hat on the table and un-

buttoned his gloves. "No, I won't sit down, thank you," he drawled. "My brougham is at the door, and I 'm in a hurry. I rather want that subscription back."

"Why, my dear fellow, you 're worse than a bankrupt bootmaker," cried Roderick, pleasantly.

"Perhaps I am, but I want the money," replied the young man.

"I 'll send you a cheque this afternoon, 'pon my soul," said Roderick.

"You 've told me that before, Usher. I want you to write the cheque now."

Roderick looked him between the eyes, and threw off his mask of cordiality.

"Suppose I say I don't like your tone, and will see you damned before I do otherwise than suit my own convenience?"

"Then I shall conclude you have bagged the money and can't repay."

"You are insulting," said Roderick.

"I believe I am stating facts. It was rather odd your meeting those bills that Willie Lathrop backed, just at that time, was n't it?"

Roderick again cursed Willie Lathrop under his breath. He turned aside and lit a cigarette, so as to gain time. Then he forced a laugh.

"Come, come, Urquhart. This is all nonsense. It was too large a sum to leave idle at my bankers, — besides, there 's always a risk, you know, — so I invested it, — in Trust Funds, of course. One can't buy and sell stock over a counter. There are delays of correspondence. And I 've been so devilish busy with wedding preparations, you know, that I have n't attended to it. I 'll write at once to my broker. There."

Urquhart listened with an incredulous smile. He gathered up his hat and gloves.

"Sometimes it pleases me to act the God-forsaken fool you did yourself the pleasure to call me. Sometimes it does n't. I 'll give you till to-morrow night to send me your cheque for £2,000 with the 2½ per cent interest. If you don't — "

"Well, my dear friend, what if I don't? "

"I 'll publish it all over London that you have bagged the money — and make sure that Miss Defries hears it."

"And what if I kick you down the ten flights of stairs of these mansions? " snarled Roderick, his hands clenched and the sweat standing on his forehead through the effort to maintain self-control.

"I 'll publish it at once," said the young man, languidly. "Good day, Usher. Till to-morrow evening, then?" He nodded superciliously and disappeared, leaving his enemy impotent with wrath and fear.

"Revengeful devil!" he exclaimed stupidly.

The servant came in to clear away the breakfast things. Roderick pushed aside the *portière* and went into his studio. The great window was open. He stood by it, heedless of the raw, damp air. From beneath the veil of fog came the uncanny rumbling of the traffic in the street. Everything was hidden. He seemed to be an immeasurable height from the earth. All below was abysmal, inscrutable. A thought shuddered through his being. One plunge into the unknown, and the sordid fears of living would be at an end. But the fog made him cough, and the tiny check threw him back again, like a wheel, into his normal groove. He shut the window and walked moodily to the studio fire.

Two thousand pounds had to be obtained by to-morrow night. Otherwise, social disaster and loss of Ella. He had not the faith to trust her with his wretched story. "I promised to marry a gentleman, and not a thief," he

heard her saying. The tone of her voice stabbed him with a greater pain than he had thought himself capable of feeling. There was only one way out of it, — another appeal to his father. He would go down to Ayresford at once. It was characteristic of him that he shivered at the thought of the comfortless journey.

A few hours later he stood, white and haggard, in the porch of Mr. Usher's house, bidding his father good-bye. It was fresh and clear at Ayresford, and the gathering twilight deepened the country hush of things.

"I 've always looked upon myself as a bad lot, but compared with you I 'm an innocent babe," said Roderick, in a queer, low voice.

The old man put out a deprecatory hand and looked at his son out of expressionless blue eyes.

"I only point the way, my son. These reverses on the Stock Exchange have brought me near to penury. I look forward to your marriage, so that you can provide for your poor old father."

"You could easily have lent me the money," muttered Roderick.

"I have shown you how to obtain it. Do not fear Matthew Lanyon, my son. We are not friends, and I will meet him no longer. But he is a snake with the fangs drawn; and I have drawn them. I have power over men. It is my way."

There was a touch of savage exultation in the old man's tone which was new to Roderick.

"You are quite sure about it?" he asked quickly.

"He would not dare to hurt a hair of my dear boy's head."

"What the devil is this hold you have got over him?"

"I 'll leave that to you as your inheritance, my son."

Roderick watched the old, ignoble figure with a feeling of horrible repulsion. He turned, bidding him an abrupt farewell, and walked fast through the garden and out at the gate on to the road that led to the station. At the refreshment bar he drank a shilling's worth of brandy.

Late that night he went into his club, — not the desolate Hyde Park where he had drunk tea with Ella, — but the little Belvidere in St. James's Street where they talk Art in Gothic

capitals and play "bridge" for high stakes. As he had hoped, he found Urquhart in the smoking-room surrounded by half a dozen men who formed the esoteric ring of the club. The young semi-millionaire was holding forth on his newly discovered genius, Pradovitch.

"Thought rapt, deep, unexpressive, — that is the only medium for the soul. The only ideal of life is to express all consciousness in terms of abstract and absolute thought — I don't know if I make myself clear. But that in vulgar language is his doctrine. As for Art, what is it but the scum that rises to the surface of the pure well of thought?"

"Oh, rot!" exclaimed young Willie Lathrop, rising with a yawn. "The Venus of Milo and Beethoven are good enough for me. Let's have a flutter. Hallo, Usher —"

Roderick came forward, elegant in his evening dress and great white bow, and suave in manner.

"Gentlemen," he said formally, in a voice that commanded attention, "I am glad to find you all here. Urquhart came to my rooms this morning and expressed himself in a manner that I am sure he will see calls for a public apology. I take you all to witness that I hand

him my cheque for £2,050, being the amount he deposited with me as his subscription to the funds of the Walden Art Colony, together with the interest on the same."

And with his grandest gesture he held out the cheque to Urquhart. There was a great silence as every one looked at the young man to see what he would do. He took the cheque, eyed it for a moment, and then met Roderick's mocking glance.

"It is quite correct?"

"Quite," said Urquhart; and then somewhat desperately, "I have much pleasure in withdrawing anything I said this morning that you may have objected to."

"Hooray!" cried Lathrop. "Now shake hands, you two, and be friends again. And Urquhart shall stand the crowd supper on the interest."

And so peace was concluded. But Roderick did not sleep that night, and the next day it was torture to meet a girl's honest eyes.

She noticed his preoccupation, was tenderly solicitous. What were his anxieties?

"If I have any, they are lest any unforeseen disaster should occur between now and Wednesday," he replied.

"Why, what should come?" she asked.

"It is only a man's inability to realise that such happiness can ever be his."

He burst into rapturous speech, carrying the girl with him on its flood. For the moment she forgot his troubled look, and when he had gone her attention was absorbed by practical details. In fact, during these days of hurried preparation, the material affairs of life were sufficient for her content. Countless letters had to be written, innumerable purchases to be made, plans for future living to be discussed. At no time does modern civilisation allow sentiment to come less within a woman's spiritual horizon than during the week before her marriage.

As usually happens, the wedding preparations extended far beyond the original design. The guest list swelled day by day. Instead of a mere vicar, Lady Milmo's favourite colonial bishop was engaged for the ceremony. The bridesmaids increased in number from two to six. The meeting of a few intimates at Lady Milmo's to drink the bride and bridegroom's health was gradually magnified into a vast reception for which the house was being turned upside down. On one point Ella remained firm. She would be married in a travelling

dress. Then there were after arrangements to be considered. Lady Milmo's old friends, Lord and Lady Greatorex, who were wintering in Cairo, had put their little place in Shropshire at the disposal of the young couple for their honeymoon. When they came back to London, they would take a furnished flat until a house could be found to suit them; but the furnished flat had first to be obtained. The days passed in a whirl of occupation, and when Ella laid her head upon the pillow at night, sheer physical fatigue sent her forthwith to sleep.

Once she was touched to tears. Matthew Lanyon had given her a magnificent present which already stood on the special table in the morning room. But he had also sent her an intimate gift, a little ruby ring, with a letter of tender affection. "It belonged to my dear wife," he wrote; "and I could give you nothing dearer to me, — perhaps it symbolises a drop of my heart's blood. . . . I would come to your wedding, my dear, but this old machine is getting cracked and wheezy, and is at present laid up for repairs. I must get Sylvester to come and mend me. But all my love will be with you." And that night she sat up late in her room writing him a long, long letter, pour-

ing out her heart to him, as she had never done before.

The letter reached him on Monday morning. He had been suffering considerably, and Sylvester was there, having made hasty arrangements for the care of his patients in town. Matthew submitted to confinement to the house, but insisted on getting up for breakfast. Bed was not the proper place for a man to eat in, he declared, and nothing but main force would have kept him there. So he sat down to table and made a valiant pretence at eating, while Miss Lanyon cast appealing glances at Sylvester and suggested arrow-root, and beef-tea, and eggs, and brandy, at intervals.

"If you hint at any more horrors, Agatha," said the old man, looking up from his letter, "I 'll go to the office."

The white reflected glare from a slight fall of snow that covered the lawn filled the comfortable dining-room. Miss Lanyon glanced through the French window and shivered. Matthew was quite capable of carrying out his threat. She refrained from further suggestions, and meanwhile Matthew finished his letter in peace.

He folded it up when he had read it and put it in his pocket. He felt happier. Ella had revealed to him a Roderick that he had never realised. The girl's early struggles showed that she had mistrusted him. Now she had arrived at the man's heart and found it loyal and worthy. A fluttering at the glass caused him to rise and gather up a handful of bread-crumbs for the birds. Having thrown it out on to the lawn, he closed the window and stood watching the feast, Dorothy by his side. It was a bright morning, the sun shining from a pale blue sky and glinting on the myriad facets of the snow. The red clusters on a holly bush and the breasts of a couple of robins among the fluttering birds made tiny specks of colour against the white. The earth was sweet. Matthew felt a sense of exhilaration. After all, perhaps this was the great reparation that through his indirect agency had been accomplished. Materially, Roderick was relieved for life from the sordid cares of poverty; and spiritually, if ever woman could raise a man's soul to gentler things, that woman was Ella Defries. His life had not been wholly lived in vain.

Soon his managing clerk brought the office

letters. They retired to the library, and Matthew threw himself with more spirit into affairs than he had been able to show for some time past. At twelve o'clock Sylvester entered with some medicine. He found his father alone, writing hard amid a sea of papers. A professional rebuke induced him to desist.

"If you write another line, I 'll go straight back to London," said Sylvester.

"You are much more needed there than you are here, I assure you," said the old man. "I 'm as fit as ever I was."

But he blotted his letter and put his papers by, and pushing his writing-chair away from the table settled himself comfortably for a chat. He was full of small interests this morning. There had been fine doings, he had learned, the evening before, at the Town Council. The idiots had actually voted against the Free Library that he had schemed out in every particular. Hodgkins, the progressive butcher, whose face was like a hollyhock, had said that he blushed to bear the name of Englishman in common with them. Matthew wondered how he did it. All the same, he must get about again and put some sense into the Council.

"I don't quite know why they listen to me, but they do," he said.

Then there were other matters. Jenkins's wife was laid up. That made the tenth child. Would Sylvester make arrangements for the three youngest children to board with the Jellicoes as usual?

"Can Jenkins afford it?" asked Sylvester.

"Of course not. Otherwise what would be the sense of our arranging things?"

Sylvester assented. The old man launched out into an invective against all the ne'er-do-weels of Ayresford who procreated large families which they could not support and spent their small earnings in drink. The brutes! Boiling oil was too dreamy a death for them. As Sylvester knew that any man of them would, if bidden, have licked his father's boots, he smoked his pipe imperturbably, unaffected by this outburst of ferocity.

"I suppose all this is pretty parochial," said Matthew, at length, "but it's a bit of the cosmos, anyhow."

There was a knock at the door, and one of his clerks appeared with a small leather-covered book. Matthew took it from him and laid it on the table.

"Take all this stuff to Mr. Findlay," he said, indicating a pile of papers. The clerk gathered them up and withdrew.

Matthew continued his parable, but his fingers played with the banker's pass-book.

"Excuse me for a moment, while I see how the balance stands," he said at last.

Sylvester nodded and stretched himself comfortably behind the morning paper. A few moments passed. Then suddenly he heard a choking sound and the violent creak of a chair. He started to his feet. There was his father fallen limp over the arm of the chair, while from his nerveless fingers a strip of pink paper fluttered to the ground.

CHAPTER XVI

AT BAY

It was not until the evening that Sylvester entered the library again. His father was still unconscious, likely to remain so for many hours. Matthew's ordinary medical adviser had consulted with Sylvester. A trained nurse telegraphed for from London had just arrived. At present nothing more could be done. Possibly the stricken man might recover. But the case was grave.

Sylvester had been puzzled all day. What could have induced the stroke? A moment or two before, his father had been in the best of spirits, talking with an enjoyment that had been very rare of late. Generally, when the heart is weak, it is some sudden shock that paralyses. But here the theory of sudden shock was untenable. Perhaps it was simply the reaction of the high spirits following depression.

Miss Lanyon and himself had dined together, — a cheerless meal. The gentle lady

wept and conjectured feebly as to causation, implored Sylvester, as indeed she had done all day, to pronounce favourably on the patient's condition. They did not eat much. The cook had sent up tearful apologies for the spoiling of a dish, on the ground that she was too upset. But they would not have noticed. The parlour maid's eyes were red. She had been some years in the house, and the personal charm that endeared Matthew to all who came in contact with him had gained the girl's affection. Miss Lanyon used to say that Matthew spoiled the servants. Matthew replied that he hated perfection, and liked them spoiled; they were more human. At any rate, his sudden illness spread consternation and dismay through the household. The news had gone abroad, and anxious inquiries had been made at the door by all kinds and conditions of folk. Amongst them was Mr. Usher, who had shuffled up to hear news of his dear friend in affliction. Sylvester had sent him a curt reply by the servant. He disliked Mr. Usher cordially, and had rejoiced over the strained relations that had kept him away from the house.

Dinner was over, and Sylvester went into the library to smoke. The room was more or

less as he had left it that morning. Matthew's pass-book lay on the table, and three or four passed cheques lay upon the book. He filled and lit his pipe, and sat down in the writing-chair to think over the case. Suddenly, the room recalling associations, he remembered the cheque he had seen flutter from his father's fingers. Almost idly he looked down to see if it was still on the floor. His eye fell upon it underneath the armchair, whither it had probably been kicked during the bodily removal of his father from the room. He picked it up. But a glance was enough to make him start back with an oath. It was a passed cheque for £3,000 made payable to and indorsed by Roderick Usher, and signed "Matthew Lanyon." At first he could not comprehend it. Why should his father have paid to Roderick so amazing a sum? And having paid it, why should he have received such a shock on seeing the cheque? He brought it nearer the lamp that stood on the table; and then, suddenly, a suspicion smote him, like a great blow. There were variations from his father's writing. His signature, so simple as to be roughly imitated with the greatest facility, had yet certain strong charac-

teristics which were missing here. Sylvester looked at the numbers of the cheques on the table; they were consecutive. The three thousand pound cheque bore a number from a totally different series. The pink colour, too, was slightly faded. Where was the book from which the cheque had been torn? His glance fell upon his father's bunch of keys, depending from one in the lock of the writing-table drawer. An idea struck him. He remembered that his father, most methodical of men, kept the stubs of his cheque-books ranged along a shelf of an old press between the fireplace and the window. For a moment he hesitated. He had never looked at one of his father's papers in his life. His intention seemed almost criminal.

"I beg your pardon, my dear, but I must," he said, half aloud, and then finding the key he opened the cupboard. A rapid examination showed him the stub he wanted. The dates on the counterfoils were of three years back. With trembling fingers he ran through the numbers. The counterfoil of Roderick's cheque was missing.

Mechanically he replaced the stub and locked the cupboard. And then he stood for a while,

fierce-eyed, shivering with a horrible certainty. Roderick had forged the cheque, and the shock of discovery had nearly killed his father.

The whole man was white-hot with fury. In such accesses of anger, stern, reserved men have killed their enemies mercilessly. Instead of confusing their judgment, their anger burns it to crystal clearness. Every action is that of sublimated reason. Sylvester remained for a few moments motionless; then he picked up a railway time-card from the table, glanced at it, and consulted his watch. He turned down the lamp and left the room. In the hall he was met by Simmons, the doctor. The latter was by far the more outwardly perturbed of the two.

"Well, how are things?"

"As satisfactory as can be expected," replied Sylvester. "Come and see." They went together slowly up the stairs, discussing the symptoms, and entered the sick chamber. There was very little change. Unconsciousness would still last for many hours. That at least was certain. Meanwhile they could do nothing but await events. Before leaving the room, Sylvester bent down and kissed his father's face, that looked shrunken in the dim

light, and never had he felt such yearning love for him. Downstairs, he drew Simmons into the library.

"I am going to London to-night," said he.

Simmons stared at him. "To London?" he queried.

"And leave my father in this condition? Yes, I am summoned on a matter of life and death."

The other was puzzled by the non-professional phrase. "An urgent case" would have been intelligible. But he made no comment. Neither of the Lanyons was a man to discuss his private concerns with his acquaintance. Sylvester continued, —

"I am more than satisfied to leave him in your hands, Simmons. You know that. But you would be doing me a good turn if you sent me two or three telegrams to-morrow. I hope to get back at night."

"Willingly," replied Simmons; and after a few more words, the two men shook hands and parted. Miss Lanyon, whose simple gospel it was that whatever Matthew or Sylvester did was right, demanded no explanations when Sylvester announced his intention of going to London; but when he was gone, she cried a

bit to herself in a sympathetic feminine way. Men were unaccountable beings in her eyes. They represented mysterious forces which she had been brought up, in her young days, to regard with respectful awe. There was a trace of orientalism in the attitude of our grandmothers towards the male sex. It lingers still in old-fashioned, sequestered places.

It was late when Sylvester's cab stopped at his house in Weymouth Street. He attempted to open the door with his latch-key, but the chain was up, and he had to ring and wait in the drizzling rain until a shivering and tousled servant came down. At another time he would have felt a chill of desolation at entering the dark and fireless house, so cold in its unwelcome. But to-night he was strung to a high pitch; and the loneliness of his surroundings failed to touch the usually responsive chord. He went upstairs to his room, dominated by a fixed idea. He would stop the marriage, thus tardily doing his father's bidding, and have Roderick arrested on a charge of forgery. If his father died, his murder would thus, at least, be avenged.

Early the next morning he went to Roderick's chambers. The servant, who was setting

the breakfast table, informed him that Mr. Usher had not yet been called.

"Wake him and say that Dr. Lanyon particularly wishes to see him," said Sylvester.

The servant retired and returned a few moments afterwards with a request that he would wait for Mr. Usher in the studio. She conducted him thither and having put a match to the fire, departed. The room was bare, the hangings taken down, the knick-knacks packed in cases lying untidily about the floor, the pictures stacked against the walls,—all in preparation for the coming change in Roderick's way of living.

Presently a door opened, and Roderick appeared in dressing-gown and slippers. His cheeks were sunken, his eyes bloodshot. He looked like a man hag-ridden. He drew a quick, short breath at the first sight of Sylvester's threatening face. All his jauntiness had gone. He went a step or two towards his visitor and said curtly,—

"Well?"

"You have forged my father's name to a cheque for £3,000," said Sylvester.

"Can I see it?"

Sylvester drew the cheque from his pocket-

book and held it up for the other's inspection.

"I perceive the bankers have honoured it," said Roderick. "Mr. Lanyon will not repudiate it."

"He will not have the chance. *I* repudiate it. He is lying unconscious, — perhaps at the point of death. By God! if he dies you will have killed him."

"You are talking rank folly," said Roderick, leaning against the jamb of the window, his hands in his dressing-gown pockets. "Mr. Lanyon as my solicitor sold out certain of my investments and sent me a cheque for the total amount."

"A cheque to which there is no counterfoil, taken from a cheque-book in use three years ago?"

Sylvester laughed harshly and buttoned his overcoat, which he had opened so as to get at the cheque. Roderick grew white and passed his hand across his forehead. There was a moment's silence.

"As a matter of elementary justice," said Sylvester, "I came here first for your explanation. As you can give none, I will now put the matter in the hands of the police, and in an

hour or two there will be a warrant out for your arrest."

He moved towards the door. Roderick staggered away from the window and drew his hand hard across his face in a gesture of utter weariness. The strain of the past week had been too much. Always thriftless and reckless in money matters, he had hitherto stopped short of unredeemed rascality. The burden of a crime had crushed his self-assurance.

"Stop a moment," he said hoarsely. "There are other considerations."

"I have them in view," replied Sylvester, icily. He turned again. Roderick hurriedly interposed himself between him and the door.

"For God's sake, man, think of what you are doing! I don't deny it. There! I can't. It is more than I can bear. I have been in hell for the past week, devoured alive, with the flames licking my soul. I was driven to it, to save myself from disgrace. I was desperate. I would have replaced the money. By Heaven! I would. It was my only chance to avert sudden crash and to marry the woman I love."

"You love!" sneered Sylvester.

"Yes, the woman I love and crave and worship, for whose sake I 'd commit a thousand

crimes. I was pushed hard, I tell you, with my back against the wall. I had to. Go back to Ayresford and tell your father I 'll repay it, — every penny. I swear to God I will."

"With Miss Defries's money. Rob Peter to pay Paul. Let me pass."

"You are going to have me arrested?"

"Certainly."

"But — Sylvester — good God!" cried Roderick, in incoherent agony. "Think of what it means — our old friendship — we were young together — we have grown old together — years ago, when you too were marrying a sweet woman, I stood by your side — "

"Your damned hand has been in every tragedy of my life," exclaimed Sylvester, kindled into a sudden flame of anger. "And a damned woman's! If it had not been for a woman, you would not have killed my father."

In the midst of his frantic anxiety, it was suddenly revealed to Roderick that in alluding to Sylvester's marriage he had touched the man's hidden wound. He hastened to repair his blunder.

"I am not pleading for myself alone," he said, drawing himself up and speaking in a more dignified voice. "You can disgrace me,

but my disgrace will fall on another — whom your father loves. If you arrest me, the marriage will be broken off by a miserable, horrible scandal, — one that will poison a woman's whole existence. It would be more than pain to your father if such hurt happened to Ella Defries."

"You certainly don't propose that I should let this marriage take place to-morrow?" said Sylvester, recovering his cold scorn of manner. But he was somewhat checked in his purpose by Roderick's argument, and Roderick saw that he had gained a point.

"I happen to know," said he, "that you would be carrying out your father's wish in preventing my marriage. I undertake to break it off. The day I marry her you can arrest me."

Again Sylvester laughed harshly. "You know very well you would be safe then, as Ella Defries's husband."

He turned and walked to the window and looked out in deep thought. He hated the man, clung fiercely to the revengeful joy of seeing him stamped out of decent existence. Compromise was wormwood, and yet compromise there must be. Roderick remained by the door straining haggard eyes at his judge,

a strange figure, with his gorgeous dressing-gown and dishevelled hair, in the midst of the dismantled and rubbish-strewn room. Sylvester's last words had sent the thrill of a forlorn hope through his veins and he waited with throbbing heart for the other to speak.

At last Sylvester faced him again.

"I will give you a day's grace," he said stonily. "You will leave Liverpool Street to-night at 8.30 for the Hook of Holland; one way of getting to the Continent is as good as another, and I happen to choose this one. You can take what steps you like to inform Miss Defries that you cannot marry her to-morrow or any other time. Those are my terms. I shall have a warrant ready. If you shuffle out of them, I shall put it in force and proceed against you without mercy."

"Mercilessness is a dangerous game when a creature is driven to bay," said Roderick.

"What could you do?" asked Sylvester, contemptuously.

Roderick drew his shoulders together and turned away. "Nothing," he said in a low voice. "No, damn it! nothing."

Somehow he could not utter the threat that rose to his lips. His soul revolted. It is one

of the strangest facts in human psychology that there is no man so vile but that there is one thing he cannot and will not do: sometimes the thing is a hideous crime, sometimes only a comparatively trivial act of dishonour; but whatever may be its relative importance, there is always one virtuous principle to which the human soul must cling. Roderick had blackmailed the father, — for that is what his forgery came to, — but he could not blackmail the son. Nor could he drag his own father, hoary scoundrel though he knew him to be, down with him in his disgrace. So he kept silent as to the mysterious relations between the two old men, and — unutterable pathos of poor humanity — his silence was a salve to his conscience.

Sylvester turned the handle of the studio door.

"Do you accept my terms?"

"Yes," said Roderick, suddenly.

"Good," said Sylvester, and he closed the door behind him and went downstairs into the street. There he took a cab and drove to Scotland Yard.

He was not the man to utter idle threats. Before dictating conditions to Roderick, he

nad coldly calculated upon the power that he could wield. Like that of every London specialist, his practice was socially varied to a curious extent. Among his patients was a high official at Scotland Yard, who, he knew, without dereliction of duty, would courteously carry out the arrangements he intended to suggest. The official received him as he had anticipated. In order to avoid a painful scandal in society, it would be better to let the culprit fly the country. Of course there would be no talk of extradition. In the mean time, a warrant could be issued and put in force whenever Dr. Lanyon gave the word. Sylvester went home grimly satisfied with his morning's work. He found awaiting him a telegram from Simmons to the effect that his father's condition was unchanged.

Roderick went into his dining-room, as dismantled and cheerless as the studio, and drank a cup of coffee. He tried to eat, but the food choked him. He was crushed, beaten, ruined. Utter dejection was in his attitude as he sat in the straight-backed chair, staring helplessly in front of him. Even in his crimes he had failed. He had deferred paying in the forged cheque to the very last moment possible for

the cheque he had written for Urquhart to be honoured by his own bankers. He had reckoned on clearing-house delay, on the half-day of Saturday, on the intervening *dies non* of Sunday, in fact, on the cheque not coming under Matthew's notice until after the wedding. But the cheque had passed from bank to bank with diabolical expedition, and, like the curses in the Spanish proverb, it had come home to roost with a vengeance.

What was to become of him? He could scarcely realise his sentence. Exile from England meant a bitter struggle with poverty; and yet exile was his irremediable lot. In eight or nine hours he must start. There was no escape. He knew Sylvester of old, as hard as iron and as cold as ice, a man to carry out his purpose relentlessly. To-night — to leave this dear world of London behind him; to-morrow — to be in the aimless solitude of some foreign hotel, when, if fortune had been kind, he would have been standing at the altar with the woman whom he desired above all women that had ever entered his life. It was like the blank future of the man condemned to death.

Thoughts of his own misdoing, of his banish-

ment, faded into a vague heaviness at the back of his brain, while the pang of a great hunger gripped him. He flung his arms on the table and buried his head and clutched his hair in both hands.

"My God, my God! I can't give her up!" he cried. Now that she was torn from him, he craved her with the awful passion of the man no longer young. A picture of her ripe lips and her fresh, eager face, so quick to flush, floated maddeningly before his closed eyes. Last night on parting he had held her close and kissed her. He felt the yielding softness of her bosom against his breast, could almost feel now the throb of her heart. He bit through his sleeve into his arm.

The paroxysm passed. He must think. The wedding must be postponed. Sylvester had intrusted him with that duty, out of regard for Ella. See her he could not; his soul shrank from it. A cowardly letter to reach her too late for questions to be asked, giving no reasons, simply stating that he was summoned away that night for an indefinite period? It must be written. He grovelled in his self-abasement.

Suddenly he raised his head and stared up,

with panting breath and trembling body. A wild, mad idea had sprung from a recrudescence of the forlorn hope with which Sylvester's words had inspired him. He sprang to his feet with a quavering, hysterical laugh.

"By Christ! I'll carry it through," he cried, and he walked about the room, swinging his arms in great gestures.

CHAPTER XVII

A WEDDING EVE

THE room was in a state of bewitching confusion. Trunks, half filled, yawned open on the floor. On the bed were piles of white garments in the midst of which here and there a pink or blue ribbon peeped daintily. Cardboard boxes and tissue paper pervaded space. Hats small and hats immense lay about in unconsidered attitudes upon chintz-covered chairs and other resting-places. A pearl-coloured ball-dress, all gauze and chiffon and foamy nothingness, hung over the bed-rail. A thousand odds and ends — veils, hat-pins, mysterious smooth wooden boxes, and cut-glass phials — were strewn on the tables. And the pale morning sunshine streamed in a friendly way into the room.

Ella was superintending her packing. Her maid having gone out for a moment, she sat on the edge of the bed (leaving, with feminine sureness of pose, the dainty piles of garments

aforesaid unscathed), and gazed critically at a hat which she held on outstretched fingers thrust into the crown. In a dark silk blouse and a plain skirt, and with her auburn hair somewhat ruffled, she looked very simple and girlish. Lady Milmo, occupying the only vacant chair opposite, also regarded the hat with the eye of experience. The examination had, however, come to an end, for Ella, after flicking the great bows with the finger-tips of her disengaged hand, threw the confection lightly on the top of the pile, and putting her hands in her lap resignedly, turned to her aunt.

"I am sure Josephine will disappoint me with the blue dress."

"Oh, no, my dear," said Lady Milmo, "kingdoms may fall and empires may decay, but Josephine never fails. A woman of her word, my dear. Don't you know what she did for La Guira, the singer? La Guira ordered four dresses to take away with her to Patagonia or somewhere. It was impossible to finish them before the morning of departure. Josephine herself raced with them to Waterloo in a hansom just in time to see the train with La Guira in it steam out of the station; and that

woman took a special there and then, and chased the train and got the dresses on board all right. Josephine is a marvellous woman."

Ella laughed. She did not care very much. Her life at that moment was too full.

"It 's quite sweet of the sun to come in and see me, is n't it?" she said.

"Provided he keeps up his good behaviour to-morrow," said Lady Milmo.

"Oh, I sha'n't mind what he does to-morrow; I shall have too many things to think of."

"But what about us poor unfortunates who are not going to be married?"

"You could be married now, fifty times over, auntie, if you chose," said Ella, out of her lightness of heart.

"The Lord preserve me!" replied Lady Milmo, vivaciously. "When poor Howgate died I vowed that when we met in heaven, if there is one, no other man should stand between us."

As the late Sir Howgate Milmo, Bart., had been a notoriously evil liver, Ella did not think there was much chance of her aunt escaping forsworn, even on her hypothesis.

"One can love heaps of times, you know,"

she said, stretching out her limbs girlishly and looking at the tips of her shoes.

"Love your husband once and for all, my dear," said her aunt, sententiously.

Ella rose to her feet and crossed over to her aunt's chair and sat on the arm, and kissed Lady Milmo. A spontaneous caress like that was rare with her, and the recipient looked up in pleased surprise. But Ella had grasped her fate in both hands and felt mistress thereof, and all seemed right with the world. She had compelled herself into entire happiness.

"Of course I do — or I shall," she replied. "Do you think I could marry a man to whom I did not feel I could give all that is in me?"

"It is the fate of women to give," said Lady Milmo, who was in a moralising mood.

"We must do something to justify our existence," laughed Ella. "Women can't do much. I used to think differently when I was young. Men do all the real work in the world, but somehow they seem to want something from women. And it's a great thing to help on the big world by giving oneself body and soul to a man."

"Cook his food and wash his clothes and

see that there is a proper supply of Salutaris water when he comes home after a city dinner That was the whole duty of woman in your grandmother's time, child."

"I think women are very much the same all through the ages," said Ella. "At least," she added reflectively, "that's the only way the riddle seems to be solved. A man does, wants, compels. A woman yields — otherwise — why, well —"

She rose, confused at her half-confession, and re-examined the hat.

"Otherwise why should I be wanting to meet poor dear Howgate in heaven," finished Lady Milmo, coming to her assistance with a humorous curl of the lip. "Anyhow," she continued with some irrelevance, "I'm glad you're going to stay in a decent Christian country, where you can wear your pretty frocks."

"So am I, auntie — now," replied Ella. "But I did n't think I should be."

Ella's maid came in, and the work of packing was resumed. Her mistress tried on the much-considered hat before the pier-glass, while Lady Milmo arranged the rumpled hair beneath, so that the hat should produce its

due effect. Then one of the bridesmaids came, ostensibly to see if she could help; really to feast her innocent eyes upon the articles of attire everywhere displayed. The time slipped by pleasantly. At twelve o'clock the parlour-maid tapped at the door and entered with the announcement that Mr. Usher was downstairs and desired to see Miss Ella on most urgent business.

Lady Milmo threw up her hands. What could he want? Men were a positive nuisance at weddings! They ought to be chained up for days before and only let loose at the church door.

"I'm in such a mess," cried Ella. But she sent down a message to Roderick that she would see him directly.

The servant smiled and departed. Ella gave herself those anxious feminine tidying touches before her glass, whose effect the eternal irony decrees shall never be noticed by man, and ran happily down the stairs to meet her lover. She turned the handle of the morning-room door and stood before him, in the heyday of her youth and her charm. All the anxieties of the past year had fallen from her. Her cheeks flushed a shy welcome. Her

eyes, honest and clear, smiled upon him. She moved quickly forward, her lips already parted in happy speech, when suddenly she felt him come upon her and encircle her with strong, resistless arms and rain passionate kisses upon her mouth and cheeks.

"Oh, my God, I love you, I love you!" he murmured hoarsely. "I can't let you go. You are soul of my soul and blood of my blood. No, Ella, no," he continued, as, confused and blushing, she strove to release herself; "I must keep you here. Heaven knows when I may hold you in my arms again. Listen, something terrible has happened, — a thing that may part our lives. Are you strong enough to bear it? Brave and strong and heroic, like the woman I think you?"

He relaxed his clasp and stood with hands on her shoulders, forcing her to look at him. She met his passion-filled eyes fearlessly, but her colour had gone.

"Part our lives! I don't understand what you mean, Roderick."

"Are you brave enough to face a terrible calamity?"

"I shall not faint, if you mean that," she replied. "What is it?"

"I must leave England to-night," he said in a quick voice. "How long I shall have to stay away, I do not know. It may be weeks, it may be months, it may be years."

She looked at him with perplexed brows and a dawning fear in her eyes.

"But to-morrow —" she began.

"There will be no to-morrow — for me. Unless —"

"Unless what?"

He turned away and paced across the room and back again. He had thrown off the gold pince-nez, and now they swung by the cord over his waistcoat, and his small blue eyes, usually obscured by them, glowed strangely and the pupils were dilated. Where the actor, the inveterate *poseur*, ended and the man began, it were impossible to tell. He was playing a part, but playing it in desperate earnestness. The words, the gestures, were false; but the yearning folly of love that vibrated in his voice was as real a thing as had ever entered into the man's life.

"I must be plain with you, Ella. It's as much as my life, my honour, your fair happiness, is worth for me to stay in England over to-night. There can be no wedding to-morrow.

I have done all that a man could do to avert things. The suspense has been a torturing agony above words. But the inevitable, the inexorable, has come. Oh, God, Ella, if you knew what living hell it is to me to tell you this!"

She put her hands before her face, feeling dazed and sick, and when she drew them away, her face was very white. Like every pure woman, her thoughts of late had been absorbed by the sweet vanities of the morrow's ceremony, with just a warm, tremulous sub-consciousness of the beyond. The sudden fall about her ears of this structure of vanities bewildered her. Her brain seemed to be an avalanche of telegrams and letters. Faces of bidden guests swam lurid before her. Roderick, a long way off, faded into infinite mist. A pang of disappointment, humiliation, she knew not what, ached in her breast. She scarcely heard or heeded what the man was saying. He stopped, seeing her so white, and looked at her, breathless. Then suddenly a cloud seemed to roll away before her, and she was conscious of him standing there with haggard eyes and features drawn in pain. Scorn of her first imaginings drove them into the limbo

of all vain things; the thrill of a proud courage nerved her; she drew herself up and faced realities. And the first reality was a rush through her being of yearning pity for the man so stricken. With an impulse of consolation she went up to him, and again his arms closed swiftly round her. He murmured burning incoherences. He could not live without her love, the crown and joy of earthly things. Life would be a purgatorial flame. He loved her. He worshipped her, so brave, so loyal, so adorable. His voice was vibrant with elemental passion.

A woman, young and ardent, with rich blood running through her veins, is, above all things, a primitive human being. It were an ill day for the pride and vigour of the race if she were not. There are moments when the world's music surges like the roar of the sea in her ears, and the heart within her is lifted to her lips; when her limbs are as water, and her body is carried in the unfaltering arms of a god through illimitable space. She has yielded, is swept away by the man's passion, deliriously lost.

As in a dream, standing there in his embrace, she heard him whisper: —

"There is one way — to scoff at destiny — to rise triumphant above it — to be married to-morrow in spite of all things. Not here. In Holland where I am summoned — I have the license — we can explain the urgency of our flight — the English Consul or Chaplain at Amsterdam will marry us. Come with me to-night — Ella — for God's sake, Ella, say that you will."

She smiled up at him without replying. The mad proposal seemed at the dreamy moment the sweetest of sanities. He continued in hurried intensity, —

"All will be so easy. You can say you are going to Ayresford — what more natural? — to stay here would be pain — there is a train for Ayresford about the time — half-past eight at Liverpool Street. I will meet you there with a ticket, — and then we shall be carried off to happiness — you and I — alone together — to conquer the world. . . . There — it must be."

He took her hands, kissed them both, and released her. She stood for a while with downcast eyes and heaving bosom, recovering her mental balance.

"You have not yet told me," she said presently, in a calmer voice, "why there should be

this upheaval. I have said perhaps I might help you. Why do your life and honour and my happiness depend upon your leaving England to-night, Roderick?"

The supreme moment had come. He braced every nerve to meet the inevitable question. Summoning up an extraordinary dignity subtly tinged with sadness, he said with grave deliberation, —

"I cannot tell you."

Ella recoiled involuntarily, staggered by the unexpectedness of the reply. She could only regard him in mute but anxious questioning.

"You must trust me, child," he said. "It is another's secret."

"So grave as to be withheld even from me?"

"Even so," he replied. "I know," he continued gravely, "I am asking you the ultimate thing a man can ask a woman, — blind trust. It is a thing that only the great soul, like you, can give. Put your hand in mine and trust in me!"

"Let me think," she said in a low voice.

She sat down on a couch, baffled. If she looked up, she met the man's burning eyes fixed upon her, and the depths of her being

were stirred. If she looked away, her life seemed fragmentary chaos, unrealisable, incomprehensible. She breathed fast from a heaving bosom. Roderick's mystery hovered between the grotesque and the tragic. To run away clandestinely with the man to whom she was to have been married with all the pomp of publicity on the morrow was an idea of comic opera. On the other hand, the blind trust required raised the proceeding to the heroic plane. Again, Nature within her shrank from mystery; she was a child appalled by the dark, and fear was upon her. But the sensitive gentlewoman felt the appeal to honour in every fibre of her pride. Generosity swelled against doubt. A strange physical coldness enwrapped her. To start to-night, with Roderick, surrendering herself utterly; the maiden in her piteously sought refuge from the thought. She glanced tremulously up at him, and her face flamed pink, and warmth entered her heart. She covered her cheeks with her hands and shrank into the corner of the couch.

"Oh, could I not join you afterwards?" she moaned. He fell at her feet and clasped her knees, broke into impassioned pleading. It

was a matter of life or death. His unbalanced artistic temperament burst all restraints of conventional forms of speech. He raved of his consuming need. He was less a man than a shaking passion.

The eternal mystery to woman is man's desire of her. It transcends her thought, it looms immense, inscrutable, and irresistible before her. She is the everlasting Semele beneath the fiery glory of Zeus. It is decreed that when brought face to face with it (a chord within her being responsive, be it understood), she shall lose all sense of the proportion between it and the infinite passions of the universe. Life resolves itself into an amazement that she, with a whisper, a touch of her hand, can raise a man from hell to heaven. In the piteous, glorious, tragi-comedy of life, which has been played on millions of stages for millions of years, this elemental fact is so commonplace that it escapes our notice. We are apt to judge from externals, from the results of adherence to ethical systems, from social conventions; and when the actions of men and women are not provided for in artificial canons, we are baffled or are shocked by a sense of the immoral, the abnormal, or the preposterous. But

men will desire and women will yield till the end of the human race.

And Ella yielded. She bound herself to meet him that evening and go with him into the darkness, whithersoever he should lead; and Roderick left the house, holding his head high, exultant in the sense of having conquered destiny.

But when he had gone, Ella threw herself face downwards on the couch in all the abandonment of exhaustion. For a while she could not think; she could only be conscious of the flow and ebb, and again the flow and ebb, and once more the flow of emotion, during the past hour. She had entered the room in light-hearted happiness; there had come the shock of an awful dismay. Then she had been lifted in the tide of the man's passion; there had followed the cold numbness of doubt; again passion had swept away reason. Now was reaction. She felt physically prostrated, and her body ached as if it had been beaten. Her eyelids burned. She would have liked to cry miserably, but she could not. She suffered the woman's torment of unshed tears. Suddenly she rose and drew herself together, despising her weakness. She had pledged her-

self to do a certain thing. It was to be done, and practical commonplaces had to be faced. First was the breaking of the news to Lady Milmo. The girl's heart was smitten with pity for the kindly lady who had entered so wholeheartedly into these wedding preparations. It would be a keen disappointment to countermand the feast, put off the guests, make lame excuses. And that would not be the end. There would be the scandal of her flight, of which Lady Milmo would have to bear the brunt. It was cruel to treat her so. She went to the window and looked out at the sunny houses on the other side of Pont Street; wondered whether they all were cages for women bound as she was in invisible chains. Her course had been marked out with scrupulous exactness; to deviate from it a hair's breadth would be not only breaking a solemn pledge, but perhaps endangering the life or honour, she knew not how, of the man she was to marry. Yet her frank soul rebelled against the deception. The hour of Roderick's departure was to be kept secret; her elopement with him not to be whispered of. She was to give out a journey to Ayresford, to escape from the painful associations of the house in

Pont Street, filled with all the vain preparations for the morrow. She had never lied barefacedly in her life, and for a moment she hated Roderick for compelling her to falseness. But then the lingering echoes of his voice hummed in her ears, and the blood rushed back into her cheeks, and she felt strong for the sacrifice of her honour.

Did she love him? She answered the self-put question with a passionate affirmative. Else why was she doing this preposterous thing? Was not the blindness of her trust the very banner of her love? A phrase of Roderick's crossed her mind. "Life is merely the summation of moments of keen living." She caught at it as a plank with the drowning man's thrill. She was living keenly; that alone was sufficient to justify everything. She was defying the set uses of the tame world. "Each man must batter down for himself the doors that hide life's inner glory" was another of his sayings. Was she not even now battering at the door? Her soul clutched at every supporting straw. Yet, in spite of these aphoristic comforts, it was with a strange, dull sense of fatality that she saw herself sitting by Roderick's side in the train that night, being

carried away further and further into the inscrutable darkness.

The first part of her task was over. She had told Lady Milmo. It had been an interview of pain and self-reproach. Lady Milmo had gasped, wept, waxed indignant. All her kindly woman's motherliness had poured itself out upon the girl, whom she considered infamously treated. It was in vain for Ella to plead the matter of life and death that called Roderick away. Lady Milmo had her prejudices. She had cordially approved of Ella's immediate retirement to Ayresford. How could the poor child stay in the house where every surrounding would be a pain to her? She had sent Ella off to lie down in peace upon her own bed, away from the half-packed litter of finery in the girl's room; and while Ella lay there with a splitting headache, helplessly counting the slow hours, Lady Milmo sat heroically before her writing-table immersed in lists and telegraph forms.

The slow hours passed. A little difficulty arose. Lady Milmo had taken it for granted that Ella's maid would accompany her to Ayresford. Ella, alarmed, announced her in-

tention of leaving her behind. She did not even wish her to come to the station to see after the luggage. She had to insist that solitude was essential. Lady Milmo yielded the point reluctantly. At last the time came. Ella's luggage had been placed on the four-wheeled cab. The door was open; the white-capped maid stood on the pavement. Ella turned with a sudden rush of emotion and kissed Lady Milmo, who had come with her to the hall.

"If I ever hurt you, dear, God knows it's because I cannot help it," she said. But before the other could reply, a telegraph boy entered with a telegram. Name of Defries. Ella tore it open, with a spasm of anticipation, half fear, half hope, that it came from Roderick. But it ran: —

"*Your coming a joy. Your uncle dangerously ill. Is crying for you. Agatha.*"

Speechless she handed the paper to her aunt. Lady Milmo glanced at it.

"Does n't it all work out for the best, dear?" she said gently. "Agatha Lanyon would not have wired if to-morrow's affair had not been broken off."

"How did she know?" asked Ella, with white lips.

"Why, I sent them a message," said Lady Milmo.

Ella bade her good-bye again. The parlour maid shut the cab-door and gave the word "Waterloo" to the driver. The cab drove off, and then Ella, spreading out the crumpled telegram, broke for the first time into a flood of passionate tears.

But some moments later she called to the driver, —

"I fancy the servant made a mistake. It is Liverpool Street I want to go to."

And to Liverpool Street was she driven.

CHAPTER XVIII

FELLOW-TRAVELLERS

A MISTY evening had followed the sunshine of the day. The lights in Liverpool Street, in shop-windows, street-lamps, and the lamps of a thousand crossing and recrossing vehicles, flared red and large through the slight fog. Luggage-laden cabs clattered down the flagged incline of the station, sounding a hard treble to the thundering bass of the street and city above. Down the sides of the incline streamed the throng of work people and belated clerks hurrying to their trains. The station portico beyond seemed a dark vortex into which this seething life was sucked with irresistible swiftness. There, in the uncertain light, was the bustle of porters unloading cabs, the quick rattle of trucks and barrows, the ceaseless patter of feet, the din of voices. It was an eddying whirl of vague shapes appearing for a moment from the fog and vanishing after a flash of passage.

Roderick stood by the wall, gazing anxiously at each cab as it stopped and deposited its fare. He had taken the two tickets, registered his luggage through to Amsterdam, and now was waiting in feverish suspense for Ella. Would she come? He looked at his watch. It was only five minutes past eight, and he had been watching for her since the quarter to the hour. He threw away a cigarette barely commenced, and a moment afterwards lit another. By the light of the match his fingers could have been seen to shake nervously. At last a cab stopped, a porter opened the door, and Roderick's heart gave a leap of relief and joy as he saw the familiar girlish figure emerge. He sprang to her side.

"Oh, thank God you have come, dear, thank God!" he whispered.

"I keep my word," said Ella, remotely.

Roderick gave some directions to the porters, and turned to her.

"I will show you straight into our carriage. I have reserved one for ourselves."

He led the way through the booking offices to the great glass-covered station, with its blue glare of electric light and babel of sounds.

"My heroic Ella," he murmured. She

raised her eyes somewhat appealingly. Then he saw she had been crying; her lashes were still wet.

"Those tears are the last you shall ever shed," he whispered, bending down to her ear. In reply she held out the crumpled ball of paper which she had kept in her hand. He stood by the platform gate and read, and looking at the telegram, reflected. The instinct of the self-indulgent man prompted a reply. A dry-eyed woman, be she never so beloved, was a pleasanter travelling companion than a tearful one. He handed her back the telegram with a smile.

"It's the dear elderly lady's exaggeration. Mr. Lanyon is kept to his room by a slight cold. That is all. I saw Sylvester this afternoon, and he had only left Ayresford this morning. Make yourself quite easy, dearest."

She followed him through the gate, along the platform where the Harwich train stood waiting.

"You take a great weight off my mind," she said earnestly. "I have felt it was wicked and selfish of me to leave him."

"My poor child," said Roderick, tenderly.

The guard hurried up and unlocked the

door of the reserved carriage. The porter, who had followed them, stowed Ella's hand-baggage and wraps in the rack. Ella entered and took her seat, while Roderick hastened away to see to the registration of her heavy luggage. Tears of a great relief filled her eyes. However much she hated Sylvester, she knew that he would not have spoken lightly to any one of his father's illness; nor would he have left his father's bedside if anything serious were the matter with the old man. Roderick's confident report reassured her. She felt almost happy. If only her head were not aching, and a strange heaviness were lifted off her heart!

Presently Roderick returned, took the seat opposite, and closed the door. His face had lost the haggardness that had troubled her during the past week and wore an aspect of conquering pride. He had looked thus in the few golden moments when she had cared for him most. His bright air of confidence gave her strength. Her pulses quickened a little. He was worthy of her blind trust. The instinct of the woman to satisfy herself that the plank on which she walks is the solid earth brought swift apotheosis of the man. She was humble, little, of no account; he was strong

and great, with the artist's noble grip upon life. And he loved her passionately. She leaned forward, touched his arm, and with the first smile for many hours she asked him whether he was content. He vowed his utter happiness.

"You will never have cause to regret this step to the day of your death," he said fervently.

At that moment the face of a man appeared at the window, and Roderick threw himself back with a stifled exclamation.

"Sylvester!" cried Ella, involuntarily.

Sylvester looked from one to the other in silence.

"I did not expect to see you here, Miss Defries," he said at last.

Ella drew herself up haughtily. "I am the sole mistress of my actions," she said. "What I choose to do is not your concern, Dr. Lanyon." For the moment indignation checked natural wonder at his presence. Sylvester regarded her sternly. His dark face seemed chiselled out of wood.

"Unfortunately, it is of vital concern to me," he replied. "But I apologise a thousand times for interrupting you." He turned to Roderick, over whose face a pallor was spread-

ing. "A friend of mine would like to speak to you for a few moments."

"I am sorry I am not at his disposal," returned Roderick, with a forced laugh.

"You would hardly care to discuss the matter with him here," said Sylvester.

Roderick consulted his watch. The spark of hope died out. There were still ten minutes before the train would start.

"Remember our compact," said he. "You guaranteed I should be annoyed no further. This is a breach of faith."

Ella leaned before the window, obscuring Roderick from the other's view.

"How dare you intrude in this unwarrantable manner?"

"Miss Defries," said Sylvester, coldly, "please do not interfere in the very grave affairs of men."

She sank back in her corner, cut to the quick by the rebuke, and quivering with baffled indignation. Sylvester again addressed Roderick.

"Your presence here with Miss Defries is a breach of faith, and renders our compact void. Once more, for Miss Defries's sake, I beg that you will come on to the platform and discuss the matter with my friend."

He opened the door. Roderick got out of the carriage and went a few paces along the platform with Sylvester. A decently dressed man took off his hat as they approached him.

"This is a police officer," said Sylvester, quietly. "He has a warrant for your arrest. You were wrong in thinking me such a fool as to trust you. My object in coming here was to make certain that you had left by this train. If you had not, the police would have been on your track immediately. If you had been leaving alone, I should have told the officer you were not here, and you would have gone scot free, and the matter would have been hushed up. As it is, you have played me false, prevailed by some devilish lie upon Miss Defries to elope with you; and, by God! I'll have no pity on you. Mr. Wigram, this is the gentleman I was speaking of."

The police officer, on being summoned, drew near, and again touching his hat stated his errand with due formality and explained that he had no wish to create any unpleasantness in a public place, and that if Mr. Usher would walk quietly by his side to the cab rank, they could drive away unnoticed. A little knot of people saying farewell to friends by an open carriage

door, and one or two hurrying passengers, eyed Roderick's ghastly face with some curiosity. The guard of the train bustled up.

"Now, sir, perhaps you had better take your seat."

"I am prevented, at the last moment, from travelling with you," said Roderick, with bitter cynicism.

The guard saluted and passed on. Roderick's eyes followed him and rested on Ella looking anxiously from the carriage window. He turned away with a sob.

"Come on, if I must go," he said hoarsely; "you will pay for this outrageous blunder, Dr. Lanyon."

He walked away defiantly with the police officer, and Sylvester went up to Ella. The guard was just fitting the key in the door to lock it. Sylvester laid a detaining touch upon his arm.

"The lady is getting out."

The door was thrown open. Sylvester took Ella's travelling-bag from the rack.

"Your companion is not going abroad this evening," said he, pausing with the bag on the seat. "And it will be scarcely worth your while to go to Amsterdam alone." The girl's

white, questioning face made him relent for a moment.

"Forgive me," he said more kindly. "But what has happened was inevitable. I have only saved you from the hands of a scoundrel."

"How dare you call him that?" she whispered with trembling lips.

He did not reply, but handed the bag and wraps to a porter whom he summoned, and descending from the carriage stood in readiness to assist Ella to the platform. She obeyed his sign involuntarily, but as soon as she stood opposite him, she turned upon him with flashing anger.

"Now tell me at once what all this means," she said in a low, concentrated tone. "I am not a child to have things hidden from me. I have lived too many hours to-day in darkness. What does it mean? Why are you here, coming between me and the man I am to marry? Where has Roderick gone? Tell me. I must know."

"I should like to spare you the knowledge,— at all events, for the present."

He made a motion of his hand to indicate the public place. His glance fell upon the porter standing expectant with the bag. Giv-

ing the man a shilling, he bade him take the things to a cab and await him there. Then he turned to Ella.

"Perhaps we might find a more suitable place," he added. But Ella stamped her foot impatiently.

"No. Here, at once! What is this mystery? Where has Roderick gone?"

The guard's whistle blew, the engine shrieked, there was a flutter back of loungers from the carriage doors, and the train steamed out of the station, carrying neither Roderick nor his fortunes, carrying only, with the grotesque irony that accompanies most of the tragic issues of life, the registered luggage of Ella and himself.

Sylvester waited until the commotion had subsided. Then he spoke in his cold, unemotional way, —

"He has been arrested by the police for forgery, at my instance."

The girl's eye closed for a few tremulous seconds, and reeling she put her hand to her heart; but she waved Sylvester away when he came forward to prevent her from falling.

"I am not going to faint — I said so before today — it is a hideous lie — he is shielding some one else — he told me it was another's secret.

It is some horrible revenge of yours — you always hated him. An honorable gentleman to do such a thing — it is ridiculous, inconceivable! It is you that have trapped him."

The lowered tones in which the girl spoke contrasted strangely with the shrieking hubbub of the glaring station. Through her veil he could see her features distorted with anger. He waited until she had ended her invective.

"He forged my father's name to a cheque for three thousand pounds," he said with cutting distinctness. "The shock of discovery yesterday has brought my father to the point of death."

Ella swung her head contemptuously.

"You told Roderick yourself to-day that Uncle Matthew had only a slight cold."

"The lying devil!" cried Sylvester, with one of his rare blazes of anger. "Read that."

He drew a telegram from his pocket, and handed it to her.

"*Mr. Lanyon's condition critical. May not live through night. For God's sake, come back at once and bring Miss Defries with you. Simmons.*"

She returned it without a word, and stood with both hands pressed closely to her temples,

in an awful convulsion of soul. Roderick's lie blazed before her eyes in letters of fire. It was blazoned upon the walls of the station. It reddened the pale glare of the electric light. It was a magnesium flame illuminating the innermost darkness of the man's heart. Roderick's mystery was a mystery no longer.

"Let us go," she said at last faintly.

They walked silently, side by side, to the end of the platform. There was the same eternal scurrying of eager feet. A train had just arrived at another platform, and the crowd of passengers were streaming through the gate on to the open space. Nothing in the outer world had changed during the past hour. But Ella was filled with a vague wonder that universal chaos did not prevail around her. She followed Sylvester in a state of dream, to be aroused to practical effort by his voice.

"This is your cab. Where would you care to be driven to?"

She collected her faculties. Pride rose in arms against betrayal of weakness.

"I suppose there is no train to Ayresford to-night?" she asked steadily.

"Yes. The ten o'clock. A fast train. I am going down by it."

"You would have no objection to my accompanying you?"

"That my father needs you is enough for me to entreat you to come."

"Very well. I shall drive to Waterloo and wait there until the train starts."

"And I in the mean time must do some necessary business."

He gave the direction to the driver and the cab drove off. He hailed another and was carried rapidly westward.

When the time came for taking her seat at Waterloo in the Ayresford train, she mechanically followed a porter to an empty first-class carriage and sat down in a further corner, broken with trouble. She was only awakened to a sense of surroundings by the door being thrown violently open as soon as the train began to move, and a man whom she recognised as Sylvester leaping into the compartment. He sat for a moment breathless, then moved up the seat.

"I did not mean to intrude on you," he said, when he had recovered; "but I nearly missed the train, and this was the first carriage to hand."

She looked out of the window into the whirling darkness.

"It does not matter," she murmured. "Nothing much matters now."

Sylvester lay back in his corner with an air of utter fatigue, and closed his eyes. They travelled thus in silence for a long time. To Ella the world seemed to have come to a disgraceful end. The dying state of the old man to whom she was hurrying was in keeping with the general finality of things. She suffered a horrible humiliation too deep for coherent thought. Gradually, however, the sight of Sylvester opposite, cold and stern, acted upon her like an irritant. At one moment she was seized with an hysterical impulse to scream. She mastered it, fighting with scornful violence. Resentment began to burn within her, first dull, then increasing in intensity to fierceness. The flame fed a smouldering horror scarcely as yet realised. Roderick was in a police cell that night. He would be tried on a disgraceful charge. The result would be imprisonment. Clearer and clearer grew the significance of the term. As a woman in touch with the thinking world, she had interested herself in contemporary social problems. Our prison system had been among those in which she had played the pretty part of amateur reformer. As the

Honorary Secretary of a society which had rapidly burned itself out with excessive zeal, she had learned many of the hateful facts. For a fortnight the fate of the tenderly nurtured gentleman condemned to the unutterable torture of imprisonment had been a nightmare. Her aunt had rediscovered a teacher of music, once a well-known singer, now voiceless through illness, Yvonne Latour, who had married a man called Joyce, a cultivated gentleman who deservedly had passed through the wintry sorrows of the gaol, and Yvonne had told her what they meant. Her own troubles, the Walden Art Colony, her relations with Roderick, had put the subject out of her mind; but now the recollection of these things grew more vivid every moment. Her own benumbing sense of humiliation was lost in the new shudder. Liar she knew Roderick to be; that he was a forger, reason forbade her to doubt. Yet by her yielding to his kisses that day, she had given him, as it were, some share of her flesh, and her own flesh quivered at the contaminating touch of the gaol.

The train thundered on. The windows of the carriage were opaque with steam. Opposite sat Sylvester like a sphinx, his cap

drawn over his eyes, so that she could not see whether they were open or shut. Suddenly the brake grated and the wheels dragged beneath the carriage, and the train stopped with a jerk at a little, vaguely lighted station. Sylvester looked up mechanically and found the girl's eyes, deep and dark behind her veil, fixed upon him. She felt impelled to speak, yet altered her appeal at the instant the prearranged words were about to leave her lips. Instinctively she sought to wound him.

"If Uncle Matthew is dying, how could you leave his side? I thought you at least loved him."

He stared at her for a moment without replying. It seemed incredible that any one should not perceive his torture of anxiety. He forgot the iron will whereby he had kept it hidden. To sit idly hour after hour, as he had done that day, poignantly conscious of every train that might have taken him to that one spot on the earth whither every fibre of his being was drawn, to disregard the piteous appeals made to him from time to time, to come and comfort the dying man whom he loved so passionately, had been an effort of almost superhuman strength. The inability of his ques-

tioner to realise his suffering bewildered him. At that instant of time it was his whole existence.

"A man's duty is above love or death," he said coldly, after a pause. "I can't discuss it with you, for you would not understand. At least, I have served him in delivering you."

She gripped the arms of the seat and for a while said nothing. Then as the train moved on, she spoke somewhat huskily, forcing herself to her point.

"Are you going to carry out your intentions — as regards — *him?*"

"Certainly."

"Has he not been punished enough already?"

"I don't understand you," said Sylvester. "He has broken the law. He has murdered my father. What punishment has he had yet? He shall have his deserts, — whatever term of penal servitude the judge thinks fit to give him."

"For God's sake have mercy, Sylvester!" cried the girl, leaning forward in her seat, so that her voice should reach him above the rhythmic clatter and the creaking of the train. "If that happened to him, it would

kill me. The awful horror of it, — have you thought?"

"I have been trained for years to think deeply before acting, even in trivial matters," he replied.

"Heaven knows what awful temptation he may have had," said Ella.

"A man who cannot resist temptation is better out of the world."

Ella's eyes flashed. The encounter braced her nerves. "Have you always resisted temptation?" she cried in sharp scorn.

"I have lived my life a stainless and an upright man," he replied sternly.

"So did Christ; but he had pity."

"I am not Christ. I am mortal, and have my limitations. Listen. This man admitted his forgery. Out of regard for you, I was weak enough to allow him a chance of escape, on certain definite conditions. These he violated, like the scoundrel he is. To let him loose now on society would be a crime on my part."

"To pardon the man who has wronged you would be the higher action," said Ella.

"It would be mere weakness," replied Sylvester.

Ella threw out her hands in a gesture of des-

pair, and flung herself back against the cushions. Then suddenly she bent forward again, and laid a hand upon his knee.

"For my sake, Sylvester! To save me from the shame and disgrace of it. To save me from the endless horror of what he will be suffering. My God! Do you think that he was nothing to me? That a man can be snatched from a woman's life to degradation without her feeling it? Do you think I am bloodless marble like you? Oh, I could not live with the thought of it. . . . It is not that I love him still. I hope never to see his face again. God knows whether I ever really loved him. But if this happens I could not live. I could not live, I tell you! You cannot do it. You shall not do it. You owe me a reparation—yes, you," she continued passionately. "You said just now you had lived a stainless and upright life. It is a lie. It is not an upright thing to win a girl's love and then cast it aside."

"Stop, Ella," interrupted Sylvester; "you are talking of things you do not understand."

"I not understand? Does the man who is lashed not understand the pain? You made me love you two years ago. I gave you my

heart, a young girl's heart, fresh and whole. You kissed me. You said in looks and all but spoken words that you were going to ask me to be your wife. For a whole day I lived like a tremulous fool waiting for you. You never came. You never spoke again. I put away my woman's pride and offered myself — that evening. You rejected me with cold cynicism. You wronged me cruelly. You owe me reparation. Give it to me now, — this man's freedom. I claim it as a right from you."

She was reckless in her self-revelation. Words came now too readily. She continued. What she said, she did not remember afterwards. Only that she had sunk on her knees before him, pleading passionately for Roderick, and that he had remained unmoved.

But as she knelt there, clutching his clothes, she looked exceedingly beautiful. With an impatient gesture she had thrust up her veil, and the sight of her young, noble face lit with terrible earnestness was a shock of strange temptation to the man. She pleaded for Roderick. A spasm of disgust, similar to that which had shaken him a month or two back when he had seen her yield to Roderick's

caress, passed through him and held him speechless.

Another stoppage of the train broke the situation. Ella shrank back into the corner of her seat. Sylvester rose and crossing to the further window opened it, and looked out upon the platform. As soon as they moved on, he drew up the glass again and turned to her, his heart hardened tenfold.

"I did all that was possible," he said. "I thought I cared for you. I found to my regret you were utterly indifferent to me. To have asked you to marry me would have been impossible."

"Oh, for Heaven's sake say no more!" cried the girl, shrinking.

"Perhaps it is best," replied Sylvester. "My determination is absolute."

And so they sat silent, facing each other, as the train carried them onwards through the darkness.

CHAPTER XIX

THE SWORD FALLS

"Oh, Syl, I can't tell you how glad I am that you are back. And Ella too—with that hateful marriage broken off. I don't quite understand how it is. He backed out at the last moment, did n't he? But my poor head has been in such a whirl all day that I don't seem to understand anything. Dr. Simmons is very kind and clever, but he 's not like you, Syl. Your coming gives me hope. Oh, you must n't let him die, Syl, dear."

Miss Lanyon put her hands on Sylvester's shoulders and began to cry softly. He put his arm kindly round her, and tried to comfort her.

"I 've been crying all day, I think," she continued. The poor lady's eyes were red; her grizzling hair, usually so neat, was disarranged; she wore an old red dressing-gown with great white buttons, within which her fragile figure seemed to be lost. The dining-

room fire was nearly out, and only one gas-jet was alight. The two were sitting up, neither able to go to bed and sleep. Ella had retired to her room almost immediately after her arrival, having learned that the old man was unconscious.

"He rallied so to-day," said Miss Lanyon, drying her tears, "I thought the poor dear had suddenly recovered. He spoke quite sensibly, though he was so weak, and, oh, he wanted you so badly, Syl. And then Lady Milmo's telegram came about the wedding, and I gave it him to read. No, you must n't scold me any more about it. I thought he would be so pleased. Then he asked where you had gone, and when you were coming back, quite in his old quiet way, and called for writing materials, and he wrote something with great, great difficulty, and made nurse and me witness his signature. It must have been to do with his will, I think. He had just time to put it in an envelope when he fainted away. He revived afterwards, and then he began to moan for you and Ella to come to him. He did n't like the nurse; the strange face troubled him, poor darling. He only wanted Ella and you. And now you have come and seen him, what do you really

think, Syl, dear? If it is the worst, tell me, for I am not afraid to hear it."

She drew herself up with a flash of family resemblance to her brother, which the physician's quick eye noticed. He replied frankly. The old man was in a natural sleep, — a hopeful sign. His recovery would probably depend upon his power of resistance. Lytton, the great specialist, was coming down to-morrow, and they might expect his verdict to be final.

They talked long together in the cold, dimly lit room. Miss Lanyon repeated her story, with fresh details added here and there, told of the kindness of Simmons, the numberless inquiries from the townspeople, broke off to recall little instances of her brother's goodness. Only to-day, during his short spell of consciousness, he had asked whether Sylvester had made the arrangement for the Jenkins' three children to board with the Jellicoes. At this announcement Sylvester brought his hand down hard upon the table.

"What a brute I am!" he exclaimed. "I forgot all about it! And he remembered! What did you tell him?"

"I said that you no doubt were seeing to the matter," replied Miss Lanyon.

Sylvester sat on the corner of the table and stared in front of him, his mind full of the father the latchet of whose shoes he felt himself unworthy to loosen, and tears came into his eyes. The incident touched him deeply. This tender thoughtfulness for little things in the midst of events great enough to absorb the attention of a strong man seemed a keynote of his father's nature.

"He is the one perfect man of his generation," said Sylvester.

A while later he induced Miss Lanyon to go to bed, and went upstairs to relieve the nurse by his father's side. And for some hours he watched the beloved face, placid and wan in the dim light. Skilled physician though he was, he alternated between hope and fear. A world without his father was unimaginable. His life was barren enough already. His father was the only being left that could satisfy the dumb craving for human sympathy that gnawed continually at his vitals. The prospect of his grim loneliness appalled him. Again he looked intently into the sleeping face. The muscles all relaxed, it appeared unutterably careworn,—the face of a man many years older. To the son it seemed as if the last two days had

brought the havoc; he cursed Roderick in his heart.

Only once before had he felt the same murderous hatred of a man. Then he was watching, even as he was doing now, by a man's bedside. The memory recurred, intensely vivid. He set his teeth as he lived over again those hours of agony and strife. Unconsciously he drew up his indictment of humanity for the wrongs it had inflicted on him. Friendship was naught. Had not his dearest friend stabbed him in the dark? Woman was inherently false and corrupt. His own wife, who had lain in his arms, had betrayed him, and she had smiled, smiled to the hour of her death. To have children was a curse. How did he know that alien blood did not run in Dorothy's veins? Woman's love, what was it? To-night Ella had confessed her love for him. It had not stopped her from throwing herself into the embraces of a satyr. The brute nature of humanity! He himself had not been safeguarded from spasms of jealousy. Fiercely he attributed them to the lower instincts. He forgot how at times in his sombre house he had let his pen slip from his fingers and had ached for the touch of a

woman's hand and the sound of a child's laughter; how a girl's fresh face, perilously like Ella's, had quivered before his vision, and how the grip of cold iron had suddenly fastened round his heart, and he had resumed his work, hard and scornful. These things that had come to him were remote from the flesh; but he forgot them. In his hour of dark misanthropy he ranked her sex and his own temptation at their lowest. For her humiliation he had no pity. Like other women, she had rolled in the mire; smirching was the natural consequence. For Roderick he had hatred, unmitigated by any pleasant memory of old acquaintance. But he remembered his father's many kindnesses to Roderick, and the man's crime was further blackened by ingratitude.

Nor did he pity the father of the son thus disgraced. The ignoble, mean old man who had always been the object of his scorn had brought his punishment upon himself; for had he not neglected the elementary responsibilities of parentage? There could be no pity for a father of whom the son spoke openly with cynical contempt. Sylvester's eyes fell upon his own father's face, and the contrast brought

a tumultuous rush of feeling. And from the wall opposite, his mother smiled down upon him through the gloom. She was gone,— the one pure, divine woman the earth had held. The one perfect man lay there, still living. He must not die. Sylvester shook with a great terror. His father was as needful as the sun in a foul and dismal world. These two were remote as stars from the rest of humanity. Through them passed his faith in God.

But his faith in man was gone. On this night of vigil, after his day of self-repression and stern meting out of justice, was the culmination of all the disillusion and the bitterness of his life. Towards the three human beings upon whom he was bringing crushing disgrace his heart was cold granite. And the old man with the kindly, careworn face slept on and on by his side.

At the first streaks of the winter dawn the door opened, and Ella, simply dressed for the day, entered the room. Sylvester rose with a frown and advanced to meet her.

"I must take my turn," she whispered.

"There is no necessity," he returned.

"I have passed through great trouble," she

said, looking at him with eyes pathetically bright through want of sleep, "and it would be mere human kindness to let me sit here for a little alone. And you must take some rest."

"I thank you for your consideration," he replied ironically, ignoring her appeal, "but I am not in need of rest." He held the door open for her to pass out, but she stood her ground.

"You are hard, but you claim to be just. Uncle Matthew sent for me. Aunt Agatha has told you. I have some right to be here. Besides, it would hurt him to know that you refused to let me be with him."

"If you put it that way, I must admit your claim," he said coldly. "If you will come into the passage, I will give you some directions in view of contingencies."

She assented, and they went out together. At the end of the passage a housemaid passed wraithlike on her way to the kitchen. The crack of the stairs beneath her tread sounded sharp in the unbroken silence of the house.

"Thank you, I will not forget," said Ella, when he had ended his instructions. She disappeared into the sick chamber; and Sylvester, going to his own room, threw himself in his

clothes upon the bed, and wrapped in a rug fell, through force of habit and through fatigue, into a heavy sleep.

A couple of hours afterwards he was awakened. Mr. Usher urgently requested to speak with him. Sylvester rose, shook the sleep from his eyes, and faced the grim contingencies of another day. He was prepared for this interview with the father, had steeled himself against whining entreaties and appeals to old comradeship. But to see him was an act of common decency, however unpleasant and however fruitless. He sponged his face with ice-cold water and went downstairs to the dining-room. Mr. Usher was sitting on the edge of an armchair, warming his plump hands before the fire. He rose as Sylvester entered, and, putting his hands behind his back, regarded him with eyes more than ever expressionless and red-rimmed.

"I had a telegram from my poor boy last night," he announced in his slow, pedantic way. "I could not come round last night. I have been suffering again lately from my bronchial tubes. My doctor tells me the night air in winter is dangerous for me. I was a prisoner."

"Your health is valuable to you, no doubt," said Sylvester, sarcastically.

"I live for my son," replied Usher, sitting down again in the armchair. "If I ran risks now and contracted illness, who would stand by my son in his hour of need? Prudence has been the guiding principle of my life. I have profited by it."

He wagged his head and looked into the fire. Sylvester turned one of the straight-backed chairs and sat down, his elbow on the table.

"Perhaps you will state your business, Mr. Usher," he said. "My time, like your health, is valuable."

"All in good time," replied Usher; "nothing good comes of hurrying. I never hurry." He rubbed his palms together meditatively, like some colossal and flabby fly. Then he continued deliberately: "I learn from Roderick that he has been arrested for forging your father's name to a cheque."

"For £3,000," said Sylvester.

"Yes. It is a great sum of money. But your father gave it to him as a wedding present. Your father is a generous man."

"Your son confessed to me that he forged it."

"Well, perhaps he did," assented Usher. "Perhaps he did."

In spite of his contempt for the old man and his pitilessness towards Roderick, he gazed upon his interlocutor with some wonder. Not a shaft of dismay at the disgrace hanging over his son's head seemed to have penetrated the brass-armoured egotism of this placid, unvenerable man. Sylvester waited contemptuously for him to speak.

"You are preferring the charge against him this morning?" asked Usher.

"I have instructed my solicitor to do so."

"There is still time to telegraph to your solicitor to withdraw it."

"I have no such intentions."

"I cannot let you proceed. I have the feelings of a father."

Sylvester rose, and thrusting his hands in his pockets, stood on the hearth-rug facing Mr. Usher.

"It is no doubt a painful matter to you," said he, with cold politeness, "but my intentions are unalterable. I will prosecute him right through. Nothing you can possibly say will have the slightest effect on my determination."

Then the old man seemed to hug his stout

body with his arms, and for the first time a gleam came into his pale eyes and he chuckled softly to himself. At the unexpected sound Sylvester started. Such symptoms pointed to senility. But suddenly the old man turned to him with a quick snarl, in startling contrast with his deliberate manner, —

"I suppose you are not aware, you young fool, that you will be sending your own brother to gaol."

He bent forward, gripping the arms of the chair, fixing Sylvester with an inscrutable gaze, his lips beneath the scrubby white moustache parted and showing his yellow stumps of teeth.

"Your brother. Don't you understand?"

"What idiocy are you talking?" exclaimed Sylvester, in angry impatience.

"I am talking the truth, my young friend. I am a truthful man," replied Usher, with mocking resumption of his usual habit of speech. "Roderick is your own dear brother."

"You accuse my father of having an illegitimate son?"

"Oh, no. Roderick is quite legitimate. He is my son. At least, I quite believed your poor mother."

"My mother — what the devil are you talking about?" cried Sylvester, fiercely. "What has my mother got to do with it?"

"Roderick is her son, my dear Sylvester. Hers and mine. She was my wife."

Sylvester glared at him for a moment, and then, the preposterous absurdity of the story dawning upon him, he broke into a contemptuous laugh and turned away. The man was mad.

"I think it time we parted," said Sylvester.

Usher's face expressed pained surprise.

"You do not believe me?"

Then as Sylvester did not reply otherwise than by a shrug, he drew a mass of papers from his breast-pocket and selected therefrom a photograph, old and discoloured, of a man and woman posed in the angular attitudes of the photographer's art in the late fifties, and clad in the uncouth attire of those days. The woman had a baby upon her lap.

"Your mother and brother and I," said Mr. Usher. "I was a handsome young man. I had fine black whiskers."

Sylvester received the picture, looked at it, and a spasm of horrible disgust shook his

frame. The young woman was his mother — unmistakably.

"She was my dear wife," said Usher.

"And you played the brute beast, I suppose, until she divorced you. And then she married my father. I see," said Sylvester, grimly.

But Usher raised his hand in deprecation. "On the contrary," said he, "we were never divorced. When I said your father had no illegitimate children, I was wrong. You are an illegitimate child."

Sylvester flung the photograph with a furious gesture into the fire. The old man darted forward to rescue it, but Sylvester roughly pushed him back into his chair, and stood over him trembling with anger. Behind him the photograph curled and flamed.

"What devilish story are you telling me? Let me have it at once, all of it," cried Sylvester.

There was a slight pause. Usher passed the tip of his tongue over his lips, and again he hugged himself in his armchair.

"I have been waiting to tell you this for thirty years. For your dear father's sake I have held my peace. I am a peaceful man. But I could not let you send your own brother to

prison, your dear mother's son. Fraternal love is a wondrous thing."

"Come to the point and tell me, or I may not be responsible for what I do," said Sylvester, in husky menace.

The swelling triumph of his long-deferred vengeance had not quite overmastered a craven spirit. A glance out of the corner of his eye assured Usher of Sylvester's desperation. The sight was an unholy mingling of delight and fear. He rubbed his soft palms together and wagged his head.

"It is a sad story. I blame my wife. She acted wrongly. We lived in Australia on a little farm. I am fond of rural pursuits. Ayresford is rural. That is why I came here. We were married and happy with our little child. We called him Roderick. It is a family name, but perhaps that would not interest you. He was three years old when your father came to these parts. Ah! he was a dashing young fellow then. He is not dashing now. Poor Matthew!"

"Damn you!" said Sylvester.

"Ah! that is what your father has often said. You are like your father. Well, to shorten a long story, he fell in love with my

wife, and she with him, and she ran away with him to England, leaving me alone with our poor little boy Roderick. Here are proofs."

He patted the sheaf of papers on his lap and signed to Sylvester to read them; but Sylvester motioned a negative. He was convinced. His anger had subsided into he knew not what state of reeling horror. Yet through it all Usher himself was revealed to him, and he regarded him as something obscene.

"And you have received money from my father all this time as the price of silence."

"I was poor, and I forgave mine enemy. I am a forgiving man. It is my way. When your dear mother died I came here and lived near him, to show that I forgave him."

"Like father, like son," said Sylvester, — "a blackmailer and a forger. Oh, my God!"

He turned away and stood with bowed head, staring at the carpet, his hands clenched. Without moving he said hoarsely, —

"Go. We have nothing more to say to each other."

"You see you can't let your dear brother go to a felon's doom — and your legitimate brother, too, my dear Sylvester," said Usher, smacking his lips at each word. Then he rose

and buttoned his frock-coat and went out of the room, chuckling quietly.

Presently Sylvester roused himself with a great shuddering sigh.

"Oh, God!" he said, and moved a step or two towards the fire.

There was a knock at the door and a servant entered, bearing a letter on a tray.

"Miss Lanyon said I was to give you this at once, sir."

He took it, found the envelope was addressed to himself in his father's handwriting. He did not notice that the ink on the envelope was wet, nor that the enclosure had been written some time previously.

"I, Matthew Lanyon," it ran, "of Woodlands, Ayresford, hereby declare that I drew a cheque for £3,000, dated the 10th December, 189–, in favour of Roderick Charles Usher, Esq., of 13 Queen's Park Mansions, London, S. W." The document was signed by him, and the signature was witnessed by Agatha Lanyon and Mary Evans, the nurse.

Like a man in a dream, Sylvester crossed to a little desk by the window, that once had been his mother's, and wrote out a telegram; then a letter with which he enclosed his father's

statement. Both he addressed to his solicitor. The gardener was summoned and despatched to the post-office. When he had gone, Sylvester was scarcely conscious of his action. Roderick's fate was of small account compared with the doom that had fallen upon himself.

But an hour afterwards Roderick was driving through the London streets, a free man.

CHAPTER XX

"OH, WHITE DOVE OF THE PITY DIVINE"

But a few minutes had passed since Usher's departure; yet to Sylvester they represented a great chasm of time, — a living self on the one side, a dead self on the other. He walked aimlessly about the room in a curious apathy. That which had been vital to him, his love and reverence for those two, — father and mother, — had been plucked away from him, and it seemed merely some reflex action that maintained organic existence.

On the wall facing the fireplace were two companion water-colour portraits in old-fashioned oval frames. He paused before them and looked dully from one to the other. These had been his sacred images in the house, the ikons of his gods. His mother smiled down upon him. Her hair, banded obliquely on either side over her forehead, gave an idea of Madonna-like purity to the delicate contours of her face. That of Botti-

celli's fair girl-mother betrayed less a soul at war with itself. And it was not the artist's contemporaneous delight in investing feminine portraiture with angelic sentimentality that was at fault. The son remembered her thus in the flesh, though older, — a rare, flower-like woman, with hands that, when they touched him as a boy, seemed holy. She was dead. That other, the young man bright and strong, looking unflinchingly at the world over his absurd black neckcloth, was now an old man, dying. And all that they left was a heritage of shame.

Their lives had been a hollow, hideous lie, — the lives of his gods. *A fortiori*, the lives of common mortality were false. He seemed to stand apart from the world, dispassionately regarding a race corrupt to its core, and shrinking from the step that would bring him again into its midst. Without Phariseeism he appeared to be the one clean man in a miry universe; the sense whereof brought with it something of the appalling. Whither should he turn without rubbing against contamination?

He moved away from the pictures and looked about the room. The familiar, old-fashioned furniture, which the old man loved to keep in memory of her who was once queen

of the little space, seemed tainted with the unutterable. He became aware of a physical feeling of nausea. The room reeked. He flung open one of the French windows with an instinctive craving for a breath of the cold December air that was blown across the dripping lawn.

He brushed aside his hair, and tried to think. He stood as a judge; that he realised. Those two were brought before the bar, accused of the sin that his organic temperament pronounced unforgivable. The pleas in extenuation would be weakness and folly; and weakness and folly he despised. He was called upon to pass sentence for the shame of which he himself was the child; and in passing it on the sinful pair he was condemning himself to a living death. The man did not see that he had been working all his life towards this doom.

The slamming of the door behind him caused him to turn round with a start. His Aunt Agatha came towards him, wrapping a woollen shawl tightly around her lean shoulders.

"Oh, how can you have the windows open on a day like this?" she asked, shivering.

He closed the window in silence and looked at her inquiringly.

"Your father has been awake a long time, dear, and is asking so for you."

"A long time?" he echoed.

"Yes; before Mr. Usher came. Did n't you know? He addressed the envelope of the letter he sent down to you. Did n't you get it?"

"Yes. I got it," said Sylvester.

"What 's the matter with you, Syl? Are n't you going to him?"

"Oh, of course," he replied. "Of course — yes."

He went out slowly and mounted the stairs with limbs as heavy as lead. He turned the handle of his father's door and entered. The kind grey eyes of the old man, propped on his pillows, met him as he crossed the threshold, and a smile flickered over the wan lips.

"I was afraid you had forgotten me," whispered the old man, feebly holding out his hand, which his son pressed in silence.

Ella was standing in the light of the window, medicine bottle and glass in hand. Until the liquid was poured out, she paid no attention to Sylvester. Then she came to the bedside

and looked across at him somewhat defiantly before handing the glass to his father.

"What is the use of this solemn little comedy?" said the latter, whimsically, his voice a whispered echo of the cheeriness of days past. "It won't make me any better. Simmons knows it and you know it and I know it. All the king's horses and all the king's men! And Humpty Dumpty does n't want to be set up again. He 's been on his wall long enough."

He drank the draught, however, making a wry face. Ella bent over to wipe his lips, but he motioned her away with characteristic independence.

"I can do that for myself. I can't do much, but I can do that. You don't know how she bullies me, Syl."

"Uncle Matthew would n't have the nurse when she came to relieve me," explained Ella.

"I want those I love best by me, as now, eh, Syl?" said the old man.

Sylvester did not answer, but stood by the bedside dumb, vainly seeking some formula of speech whereby to simulate emotion. Ella set the wine-glass on the table and smoothed the pillows and counterpane, then lingered by the sick man, looking down upon him with a

puckering of the brow, as a woman will, counting over the little tale of duties specified by the forth-driven nurse, so as to make certain of no omission. But her presence there filled Sylvester with dull resentment.

"My father has something particular to say to me," he said stiffly. "Do you mind?"

"I was on the point of going," she replied, somewhat surprised at feeling hurt by his tone, for she had thought that the successive emotional shocks of the past four and twenty hours had killed all feeling within her for ever. Recovering herself, she bent over the old man, kissed him, and crossed to the door. Sylvester met her there and accompanied her into the passage and closed the door behind him.

"How much does my father know of Roderick Usher's affairs?"

She looked at him bravely enough.

"Nothing. I believe he guesses. I have told him he was summoned abroad suddenly."

She moved away.

"Stop," said he. "There is something else."

She drew a step nearer. "I can't bear much more," she said quietly.

"It may relieve your mind to know that I

have withdrawn the charge entirely. He is perfectly free."

She stared at him for a moment, then grew deadly white and fainted. The girl's overtaxed strength had given way at last. Sylvester caught her in his arms and prepared to carry her to her room not far off along the passage; but at that moment Miss Agatha Lanyon with Simmons turned the corner, and he gave Ella into their charge.

"I 'm staying with my father," he said to Simmons. "Come in later."

On the other side of his father's door he forgot the recent scene. Of what importance was a girl's fainting compared with the death hovering in this chamber and the death enthroned in his heart? He approached the bed. Matthew looked up at him wistfully.

"You can't expect me to live for ever, you know. I really have had enough of it, so don't fret."

A thrush fluttered against the window for a moment. Matthew started.

"What was that?"

"Only a bird beating against the pane, attracted by the fire, perhaps."

"We do that all our lives long. The invis-

ible barrier. Oh, it's time to go, Syl, when a man begins to moralise. The moral always comes at the end of the story. Sit down on the bed, my son. I want to talk to you."

Sylvester obeyed. An expression of pain crossed his face. The old man's undismayed serenity moved his admiration. He would have given worlds to have uttered the cry of grief and love that would have been possible an hour ago.

"You are a brave man, father," he forced himself to say.

"No; a coward. A pitiable old coward. You received my letter this morning?"

"Yes. It is all right."

"You found a cheque yesterday — thought it forged — stopped Ella's marriage?"

"Yes, and brought her back with me."

"But you will believe that I wrote the cheque?"

"If you wish me to," said Sylvester.

There was a silence broken only by the crackling of the fire and the sobbing of the wind outside among the bare trees. Matthew gazed at the patch of sky framed by the window — it was one of his little obstinacies to have the fullest daylight in his room — and

watched the scudding clouds. Presently, without turning, —

"Syl," he said.

"Yes, father."

"Something is breaking my heart. It has been the dream of my life to leave you a little fortune to make you independent, but I have lost it all, nearly all."

"You must not be distressed at that," replied Sylvester. "I am earning a good income and am putting by money. In twenty years I shall be a wealthy man."

Matthew turned a face of intense anxiety, and it was some seconds before he could speak in his feeble voice.

"But Woodlands will have to go. It is heavily mortgaged, — a debt I owe to Usher. Forgive me, Syl; I tried so hard to keep it. You 'll find Usher and Roderick in my will, you the residuary legatee; but there will be nothing. I will explain a little."

He paused, thinking of some explanation, a debt incurred to Usher long ago. But Sylvester, imagining the story to be the one of sickening shame he had just heard, sought to save the old man unnecessary pain.

"Don't say anything. Usher has told me."

Matthew looked at him wide-eyed.

"Usher told you?"

"Yes."

"Everything?"

"Yes."

"From the beginning?"

"Yes. This morning."

"You were threatening Roderick with a prosecution?"

"Yes. When I learned that he was — my brother, I instructed my solicitor to withdraw the charge."

"Merciful God, have pity on me!" murmured the old man, with closed eyes.

The tremendous irony of existence crushed him. To save his son this knowledge, he had endured over thirty years of abject humiliation. The son by his own act had brought the knowledge upon himself. It is an awful thing when a strong man comes face to face with the futile result of all his strength.

Presently he opened his eyes and looked wearily at Sylvester.

"Forgive me, Syl. Don't judge after the penalty has been paid. Even common law cannot sentence a man twice for the same offence. And I've served my time, and so

did she. My God! we served it twice over. And no one knew or pitied us. I would have killed myself cheerfully to spare you the knowledge."

His voice weakened, and he murmured an inaudible sentence, then lay back exhausted on his pillows. Sylvester looked at the kind, strong face, now so ashen and aged, and a gleam was revealed to him of the spirit's tragedy beneath; confused and blurred, it is true, but still a gleam that filled him with vague disquietude. It dimly suggested possibilities of life beyond the jealously guarded gates of his soul.

"You must have pity, my son," whispered Matthew.

The tone wrung the young man's heart like a material grip. It was the first sign of returning power of sensation. He cleared his throat and said constrainedly,—

"Don't talk like that, father. I am your son and must always honour you."

Matthew again turned his head and watched the grey sky. He knew his son to be a stern man, and the austere sound of his words chilled him more than the death he felt approaching.

"What can I do?" he murmured, dis-

pirited. "It was a long, long penance. Don't turn from me, my son."

"But — father," said Sylvester, brokenly, "everything seems to have left me."

The numbness had gone, and the whole sensitive man writhed in sudden pain, with loss of faith. His mother, whom he had deemed holy as a saint, his wife whom he had worshipped as a star, — both to have been false wives, women of shame! The old torture revived, intensified tenfold. The sight of the once revered being who lay dying in utter sadness before his eyes, and for whom the old love was now fighting within him for mastery, raised the torture's poignancy to such a pitch that at last it broke through the reserve of a lifetime and found vent in a great cry, —

"My own wife was unfaithful to me. How can I judge my mother?"

A flush of life entered the dying man's cheeks. He turned quickly; his eyes were luminous.

"Constance? I did not think you knew — till the other night. And then I hoped against hope."

"Did you know? How long? I only learned it after her death — Leroux's last ill-

ness. My God! does all the country-side know?"

"No, Syl. I alone."

He sought his son's hand on the coverlet, and then continued in the calm, assured tone that Sylvester knew had given strength and comfort to so many. The voice had grown suddenly strong.

"She came to me herself, and told me, a soul-stricken woman, — just after. She loved the man, Syl, and had always loved him. Circumstances estranged them, they thought for ever. And then — she was a brave woman, Syl — she fancied she could make a good man's life happy, — yours. But the mistake was cleared up, and he returned. She loved him, — my boy, we can't kill love, — but she was proud of her honour and scorned running from temptation; relied on her strength too far, until one day, only one day, Syl, it failed her, in a whirl of madness. She came to me to ask what she should do. I have never seen such frantic grief in a human soul. And a good many have brought their troubles to me," he added with one of his rare smiles.

"That is true," said Sylvester. And a sudden impulse made him add, "God bless you!"

For the thought of a soul in pain flying instinctively to the sympathy of those kind eyes brought a gush of tenderness. He saw him again as the wise counsellor, the generous friend, the child-hearted lover of all things, great and small.

"And you told her—?" he queried in a low voice, deeply moved.

"A greater judge than I set the precedent. She was the truest wife to you thereafter."

"Tell me, father," said Sylvester, huskily, "when was it? Dorothy?"

"Your own flesh and blood," said the old man, gripping his hand. "My poor boy, how you must have suffered!"

He lay back again, prostrated by his sustained effort of speech, and closed his eyes. Sylvester leaned forward, half reclining on the bed, still holding his father's hand. And as he sat there silent, a veil seemed to be drawn from before his vision.

"She— Constance must have suffered," he said at last.

Matthew opened his eyes and met his son's gaze wistfully.

"Don't we all? If the stainless like you suffer, what of us poor sinners who struggle

towards the light! Think of the agony of that pure and delicate soul who bore you, my son. Pray for all poor souls, Syl."

His voice had grown singularly faint. The tears leaped to Sylvester's eyes. He tried to speak, but his throat was clogged with unaccustomed sobs. With instinctive ashamedness he buried his face in the pillow next to his father, still holding his hand. He lay there a long time, his heart aching with the returning love as a limb to which the tourniquet has been applied aches with the returning blood. Once the old man whispered a prayer for the son's forgiveness, and when Sylvester pressed his hand, relapsed into his half-sleep as if reassured. Time went by. Presently Sylvester heard him murmuring in a scarcely audible voice. Gradually the sense of the words came to him. The old man was repeating scraps of verse: —

"Frères humains, qui après nous vivez,
N'ayez les cueurs contre nous endurciz,
Car, si pitié de nous pouvres avez,
Dieu en aura plustost de vous merciz.

. . . . . .

. . . . . .

Ne soyez donc de nostre confrairie,
Mais priez Dieu que tous nous vueille absouldre!"

There was a great pathos in the broad English accent with which he murmured the old French words, and for the first time in all his life Sylvester understood them. He raised his head and saw his father's lips moving dumbly. After a little the voice came again, broken and faint, and only by a word here and there could he gather the meaning. It was from Swinburne's "Garden of Proserpine:"

> "... *Even the weariest river*
> *Winds somewhere safe to sea.*"

He repeated the couplet two or three times. He had never been a great reader of poetry, but of some half-dozen poems he was particularly fond, and had made them his own, and had woven them into the texture of his life. Among them were such dissimilar things as Villon's "Ballade," Macaulay's "Battle of Ivry," Tennyson's "Brook," "The Ancient Mariner," and Sylvester had often smiled indulgently at this little anthology, his father's simple spiritual equipment. Especially had he wondered at his assimilation of this poem of Swinburne's, so remote in feeling from his steadfast outlook upon life and his intolerance of cowardly shrinking from its responsibilities.

But now he comprehended that his father was a weary, weary man, and that one of the most beautiful of all utterances to the weary man's heart had brought him comfort.

" Then star nor sun shall waken,
Nor any change of light;
Nor sound of waters shaken,
Nor any sound or sight;
Nor wintry leaves nor vernal,
Nor days nor things diurnal;
Only the sleep eternal
In an eternal night."

The murmuring voice ended the poem. Sylvester drew the old man's withered brown hand to his lips.

" Forgive me for not understanding, father," he said brokenly. " I am glad I know. I love you and my mother more than I have ever done. Would to God I had been a tenderer son to you ! "

Matthew's clasp tightened, and a smile hovered over his face. He knew that the awkward words came from his son's heart.

" We understand each other, Syl. *Tout comprendre*, et cetera. . . . I am happy. I have never been so happy in all my life — ' the

burden has fallen from me — fallen into the sea.' I 'm sleepy, Syl — stay by me — it comforts me."

So Sylvester, still holding the dear hand in a warm clasp, and fearing to move lest he should disturb the quiet slumber into which the old man had fallen, remained by his father's side, his face hidden in the pillow. And as he lay, there was accomplished one of those integral spiritual changes that can only be wrought once in the lifetime of a man here and there. The White Dove of the Divine Pity overshadowed him with its wings, and he saw deeply into the mysteries of life. He beheld the unutterable pathos of man, his clogged aspirations, his heroic weakness, his piteous fortitude, his everlasting struggles. It was revealed to him that there may be more of the warm spiritual essence of humanity in a single passionate sin than in a hundred austere virtues.

His father, mother, Constance, Leroux, Ella, all of whom he, the upright, stainless man, had condemned, stood before him clothed in a new light; and by reason of their warm humanity, their struggles, their sufferings, they stood higher in the scale of being than he.

He saw the loves of those two whom he

had so cherished unfold in tragedy before his vision. They were two rare natures, he understood, fitted only one for the other, too fine for commoner clay. He knew the agony of the first early struggle, the eternal conflict between love and that which the world accepts as duty; the mother's heart torn asunder between the child of her body and the man of her heart's core; the ignoble husband a thing of horror in her thoughts. Then came their life together; the perfect union; the sweet community of noble end; but every step to happiness dogged by the footfall of pain. What must they have suffered, the two sensitives, with minds (in the son's fancy) of gods and hearts of little children! He remembered that there were times when his mother would stand by the window, lost to external things, and strain her vision through infinite space; and he knew now it was the yearning for the child that she had forsaken.

And then she died, the pure gold of her spirit worn thin by suffering. He remembered his father's ashen face; how he clung unspeaking to him, even as he himself in after years had clung to Dorothy. Then came the proud

man's lonely penance; Usher's arrival with Roderick. He had wronged the man and wronged the boy; but what unwearying efforts to redeem in full! The weight of the burden fell upon Sylvester, and he knew its heaviness. He knew the scrupulous gentleman's revolt against the forced intimacy with the underbred egotist, lost to self-respect, the rapacious black-mailer, the vampire that sucked his heart's blood. He knew the sordid cares of money that had fallen on the old man, his struggles to leave his own son an independent fortune and the family home, and at the same time to carry out his chivalrous vow to give an exact equivalent to the wife's deserted child; the agony of effort to spare his son the knowledge. And all that had left untouched his tender, generous heart, which all men loved. A new reverence arose within Sylvester's soul.

And that other, — Constance? Had she not struggled, silently, indomitably, filling his existence with wifely devotion, battling night and day with the hydra-headed love that seemed unconquerable? Had she not fought and suffered and triumphed? And Leroux? Had he not shared in the battle and the suffering and the victory? Had she not, Ella,

too, bravely striven, seeking light through the darkness that he had cast about her? And Roderick? Who was he that he should judge his fellow? The fierce hate died for ever in Sylvester's heart. The bewildering knowledge of man's infinite weakness, man's infinite strength and endurance, stirred his inmost soul with unutterable pity.

A touch on the shoulder aroused him. Instinctively he sought to free his hand; but the clasp that held it was singularly stiff and cold. He lifted his head with a start and looked round. Ella was standing behind him. Then he freed himself and leaped to his feet. Their eyes met, then turned to the figure on the bed. He bent over, looked intently into his father's face, felt his heart. The erring, beautiful life had ended in his sleep.

Without a word spoken, they straightened the limbs and smoothed the bed, the girl crying silently. As soon as this was done, she whispered, —

"I will leave you."

But to her great wonder, he took her hand and raised it to his lips.

"No," he said; "stay."

CHAPTER XXI

HERITAGE

They buried Matthew Lanyon in the quiet churchyard at Ayresford next to the woman who in everything but law had been his wife. Half the small town thronged about the grave in sorrow. All felt that one of the chosen had dwelt in their midst, and that they were poorer by the loss of the kindness of his simple heart and the wisdom of his grey head. The four chief mourners stood a little way apart, close together. Sylvester held the child Dorothy tight by the hand, finding unspeakable comfort in the tiny clasp, and let the tears fall fast and unheeded down his face. The grave seemed a chasm that separated them from the rest of the world. The child, Agatha Lanyon, Ella, and himself stood alone, curiously remote, and united by a new and strange bond. For the first time for many years he felt the preciousness of human relationship. Of aught save this and his irreparable loss, he was unconscious. The crowd was a vague mass

dimly seen through a mist of tears. He scarcely heard the old rector's voice reciting the familiar words. But when the first clod of earth clattered sharply upon the coffin-lid, he turned away with a sob; then meeting Ella's swimming eyes, he sought her right hand with his left and holding it turned again. And never so much as at that moment did he need the strength of human tenderness; for looking up he saw standing at the foot of the grave, his ignoble figure defined against the old grey church, Usher wagging his bare head in simulated sorrow and gazing at the last that was visible of his enemy. Then the old man stooped down and threw a lump of earth into the pit; and as he rose Sylvester saw an expression of indescribable malice pass over his face. Quivering at the supreme insult, the young man turned to Ella.

"Thank God," he said; "nothing can hurt him now."

The reference was too pointed for her not to comprehend. She questioned him dumbly, feeling suddenly brought to the brink of a revelation.

"It is selfish to wish him back," said Sylvester.

They remained a few moments longer. The crowd was slowly disappearing through the grey of the early winter twilight. The rector came up with a few words of sympathy and crossed the churchyard towards the rectory. The grave was nearly full.

"Come," said Ella, gently, and they went to the path where the mourning coach awaited them. They spoke but little. Miss Lanyon cried softly to herself. Ella leaned back on the cushion with closed eyes. She was very weary, spent with emotion; yet the evil spirit of unrest was laid within her. The past upheaval had been phantasmagoric, in which her integral self had been lost amid a whirling army of unreal shapes. Now, brought into contact with an elemental reality, death, and with a deep and simple grief, it had emerged clear and definite. For the first time for many months the vibrations of her soul rang true, soothing her like sweet, sad music after devil's discord. Sylvester's words by the graveside had moved her. She remembered now a pain that had often come into the old man's eyes, and she wondered reverently. Sylvester sat opposite, his arm around Dorothy, who looked up shyly yet gladly into his face, un-

able to explain to her childish mind this revulsion of passionate love. To him it was a happiness that flooded his soul. The parched places drank it in like the river of life. He was a new man, able to feel in all its sacredness the sorrow that had come.

His temperament had undergone a curious transmutation. Instead of flying, as used to be his wont, to solitude, to brood over his grief, a newly awakened instinct drove him imperiously to companionship.

"Come down soon," he said to the two ladies when, on their arrival at the house, they went upstairs to take off their things. And they all sat together for the rest of the long evening, and while he talked, Ella wondered at his gentleness.

At ten o'clock the ladies retired. He accompanied them to the hall and lit their candles. Miss Lanyon bade him good-night and disappeared up the staircase. Ella held out her hand. He kept it in his for a moment.

"Won't you stay up with me a little longer?" he asked humbly. The light of the candle played amid the dark gold of her hair and lit up her face, that gleamed very pale in

contrast with her high black dress. His eyes, resting upon her, found her stately and sweet. He forgot that only a few days ago he had despised her, classing her with the wanton of an inferior sex. She stood before him something noble, helpful, mysterious. In her calm gaze he read the certainty of a high companionship. He was dismayed by the sudden revelation of his loss.

"Willingly," she said. "But I am so tired."

"Just ten minutes," he pleaded. "I hate to be alone."

"You?" Surprise was in her tone.

"I have been alone so much," he replied simply.

She blew out her candle and went back with him into the library. Then she sat down in Matthew's great leathern chair and watched him as he stirred the fire. Much of her bitter resentment against him had died by the old man's death-bed. The common sorrow had brought them once more on to the plane of old relations. The sudden change in his attitude had helped the promptings of her nobler nature, and generously she had given him the dumbly craved sympathy. Besides,

the old man's tenderness was too fresh a memory for her to be harsh now to Sylvester.

The fire burst into a blaze. Sylvester drew himself up and stood on the hearth-rug looking at her, and all the hardness had gone from his face. Suddenly he spoke.

"I am a poor creature, Ella. I know it now. You have every right to think ill of me; but try to think as well as you can — for the old man's sake."

"The last few days have changed so much," she answered.

"Could they bring you to forgive me for all the pain and suffering I have caused you?"

She drew a little sharp breath. "We need never speak of that again. It is behind us."

"But it is beginning to be very present with me," he answered gravely. "Lately my eyes have been opened to many things. Some day I may find it in my power to tell you how. I have wronged you cruelly and unjustly. I would give much to make atonement — but one can never atone. One can only crave forgiveness — and pity for a blind man. I feel I can ask it of you now. Since you have been here you too have shown me things I never knew of. For nearly two years I have given

you every reason to hate me. You have put all aside, treated me with a sister's gentleness, given me all your sympathy and tenderness. I am not accustomed to perceive large and generous natures. . . . I will make a confession. In my morbid arrogance and folly, I put myself upon a pedestal and regarded you, God forgive me, as something beneath me. You are as far above me as he whom we buried today. I had to tell you."

For a few moments she could not find words to reply. She had never known him to humble himself like this. It was hard to reconcile him with the grim, pitiless man who had sat opposite her on that nightmare journey from London.

"I did hate you — bitterly," she said at last. "I don't think I do so now. It is easy to say 'I forgive you,' but I don't quite know what it implies. As for one of us being higher than the other, you are a great physician, and I am just an ignorant girl with a miserable set of unregulated emotions — "

"You should thank God for them," he interrupted.

"They haven't brought me much happiness," she said, with a little shrug of her shoulders.

"See, I am frank! No, I won't say I forgive, but I 'll think kindly of you, Syl, I promise."

"It is all I dare hope for," he said. And so the enmity came to an end.

For the next two or three days, Sylvester was busy with his father's affairs. The will provided for a large sum to be paid to Usher, another to Roderick, while Sylvester was the residuary legatee, charged with a yearly allowance to Miss Lanyon and certain minor bequests. But after deducting the legacies to the Ushers, there was nothing left in the estate but Woodlands itself, and that was heavily mortgaged, and the mortgage had been bought up by Usher. Sylvester reviewed his own financial position.

His professional income was fairly large, and showed every prospect of increasing year by year, but of capital he had little. Dorothy's future had to be provided for. Miss Lanyon must receive the amount specified in the will. Could he afford to pay the interest on the mortgage and keep up a large country house and grounds as well? He could not. Woodlands would have to go. The three thousand pounds which Roderick had fraudulently drawn

from the estate would have made a considerable difference in Sylvester's calculations.

From his father's books he discovered that this sum roughly represented the sale of certain stock a day or two before the cheque was forged, and lay at the bankers awaiting reinvestment. How did the knowledge of this reach Roderick? Sylvester was puzzled, for a man does not usually keep a balance of three or four thousand pounds to his credit account, and Roderick was too shrewd to run the risk of so large a cheque unless he knew there would be an adequate sum to meet it. Rightly he concluded that Mr. Usher had given his son the information. But whether Roderick was acquainted with the blackmailing secret he could not tell. An instinct of generosity, newly awakened, prompted the conjecture of Roderick's ignorance. On this assumption he arrived at what happened to be the correct solution: Roderick in desperate need of money had applied to Usher; the latter had refused; had suggested the forgery, knowing of the sale of stock, and had given him the cheque which he himself had once abstracted from Mr. Lanyon's cheque-book so as to meet any sudden emergency, at the same time assuring his son

against any unpleasant risks on the discovery of the forgery. Roderick's silence on the point Sylvester could only put down to his credit.

Both Ella and Miss Lanyon were acquainted with the terms of the will, though neither as yet was informed of the financial condition of the estate. The large sums bequeathed to Usher and Roderick had astonished them. Sylvester explained vaguely that they were in payment of a great debt of gratitude which his father had incurred when Mr. Usher and himself were young men together in Australia. Miss Lanyon, who never questioned such statements, took refuge in her grief from further thoughts on the matter, like the gentle, simple lady she was. But Ella, with Sylvester's words in the churchyard fresh in her mind, scented a mystery. After the reading of the will, the subject was not openly mentioned by her or by Sylvester. Roderick's name stood between them. The silence was a restraint which each felt to be irksome. At last Ella, with a woman's greater moral courage, or perhaps with a woman's love of self-castigation, resolutely plunged into mid matters.

"Would you think it impertinent of me

if I asked you to let me discuss Uncle Matthew's will with you?"

She had stopped him by the library door, as he was entering after breakfast.

"By no means," he replied courteously, holding the door open for her. "Come in."

"What has happened to me during the last six months," she said, when they were seated, "will remain with me as a memory all my life. I should like to know what to think about — Roderick." She got the name out bravely, after a second's hesitation. "He really did what you accused him of?"

"He acknowledged it to me," replied Sylvester.

"Has he always been — what men call a scamp, or was this a sudden temptation?"

"He was in a desperate plight. That I know. I can't say what he was before. I have had a bitter lesson in judging men. All my standards have fallen away, and Heaven knows whom I dare judge. One does n't know what 's resisted. Burns said that a hundred years ago. And one does n't know what remorse follows. The human soul is an awful thing. Men are better than their deeds. There is good in Roderick. I believe it."

"And his father?"

"What do you mean?" he asked, startled.

"Your father's will, — all that money to those two."

"I explained to Aunt Agatha."

"That was no explanation. From a hundred things I can remember now, I can't help feeling that there was force in the matter — oh, a horrible feeling — if it is as I suspect, you can understand — "

"I firmly believe Roderick to be innocent of any wrong of the sort."

"Thank you," she said. "And his father?"

Sylvester rose and filled his pipe without speaking. It seemed odd to him that he felt no resentment at her questioning him. The chord in his temperament that once would have vibrated sharply and jarringly seemed to have snapped. He could only admire in a helpless way the strength of character that had carried her through so terrible an ordeal, her magnanimity, and the acuteness of her perception. But he filled his pipe with great deliberation, for to answer was difficult.

"I told you, Ella, I was powerless to judge any man," he said. "Take my assurance as regards Roderick and forget it all. The

answer to your question I have no right to give to any but one being in the world. Then it would be my duty."

"Dorothy?"

"No. Another."

Their eyes met for a moment. Hers lowered, and a faint spot of colour came into her cheek.

"I understand. Forgive me," she said.

There was a slight pause. She rose to go. Suddenly Sylvester detained her.

"I may as well tell you what all the world will know soon. After paying these legacies there will be nothing left for the residuary legatee save Woodlands, and that is heavily mortgaged. I shall have to sell it."

"Sell Woodlands!" She looked at him aghast. "Why, I thought Uncle Matthew was leaving you a small fortune. It was the dream of his life!"

"He has left me, thank God, an infinitely greater inheritance," said Sylvester.

She did not question him, only looked at him blankly, dimly comprehending. Then she reverted to the more easily intelligible.

"But to sell Woodlands!" she reiterated. "Impossible! When we were tiny children,

he used to talk of your living here after him. You must."

"I have n't the money," he said sadly.

"But I have. I'll buy it. I shall. You need n't laugh. Who in the wide world can prevent me?"

"My dear Ella," he said with a smile, "how would that help matters? I could not live in your house."

"Dorothy and Aunt Agatha could. You could rent it. There are many ways. Anyhow, Uncle Matthew would sooner have it in my hands than in a stranger's. I have made up my mind. It will be my first investment."

And so as to have the last word, she swept across the room and retired. The swish of her skirts had hardly ceased to sound in Sylvester's ears when a servant came in with a letter. It bore no stamp, and was in Roderick's handwriting.

"Trotter from the White Hart brought it, sir," explained the servant.

The letter ran: —

Having received your solicitor's letter concerning the legacy under Mr. Lanyon's will, I came down last evening to see my father. In the course of con-

versation he revealed to me facts which have literally stunned me. I must see you or write to you. But as these things are best unwritten, perhaps in the utterly unprecedented circumstances you would be willing to bear the pain that such an interview might cause you, and make an appointment to meet me today. I would suggest this hotel. Perhaps I have little right to do so, but I earnestly beseech you to believe in my good faith.

RODERICK USHER.

Sylvester read this letter, so uncharacteristic of the man as he had known him, with a recrudescence of implacable feeling. To meet him was hateful. The agony of the journey to Ayresford a week ago came upon him. He crumpled the letter tight in his hand.

"He was to wait for an answer, sir," hazarded the servant, after a time.

The commonplace, as it often does, brought reaction. He scribbled a line, fixing the appointment at twelve.

He found Roderick pacing up and down the stiffly furnished and somewhat dingy private sitting-room of the White Hart Hotel. The two men brought suddenly face to face remained for a while in an embarrassed silence,

each looking in the eyes of the other. For the first time Sylvester realised in all its significance the blood tie that bound them. This man was his brother. Grotesque and incongruous though it seemed, the fact was driven home to him as by some mighty blow. This man's mother was his mother, — the mother who had sung him to sleep as a little child, who had listened to his boyish confidence, who had been inwoven in all his early life, whose voice, whose caress, whose fragrance, lingered vividly in all his senses, whose body and soul were unalienably *his*. A horrible jealousy seized him.

Roderick, though point-device in blue serge suit and saffron-silk tie, looked aged and careworn. The lines under his eyes had deepened. He had lost flesh, and his cheeks were flabby. He was the first to break the silence.

"It may be absurd for a man of forty to talk about his mother, but if I had had your advantages in that respect, I might have been a better man."

Then Sylvester's jealousy vanished, and he remembered the wrong that had been done.

"My father did all that a human soul could do to make atonement," said he.

"And mine did everything in his power to prevent it. Will you sit down?"

Roderick motioned Sylvester to a chair, and sat down near him.

"I don't pretend to love my father. I never had reason to. I am a bad lot, I know, but compared to him, I am the incarnation of virtue. When I forged the cheque, I was given to understand for the first time that my father had some mysterious hold over Mr. Lanyon. But, as God hears me, I never dreamed until last night of the true nature of the case. Do you believe me?"

"Yes," said Sylvester; "I believe you."

"Thank you," returned Roderick; "now I know where I am."

He lit a cigarette, having offered his case to Sylvester, who declined.

"It is now in my power," said he, after enjoying the first two fragrant whiffs, "to restore the money I stole from you. You observe I have the grace to use the naked expression. Will you accept it?"

"Certainly," said Sylvester. "It is but just."

"Did you think I would repay you?"

"Frankly speaking, no."

"And having heard my father's story last night, do you think I'll touch a penny of your father's money?" he cried, bringing his hand with a thump on the round centre-table. "My God! I would sooner die."

"The balance above the three thousand is yours," said Sylvester. "I cannot accept a gift from you."

Roderick puffed violently at his cigarette, threw it away, and rose to his feet excitedly.

"I can't touch it. I have been a damned villain, I know. I was hard put to it, and I worked upon a girl's emotions so that I could marry her for her money. Then, by Heaven, I began to love her, finished by loving her madly, with an insensate passion. To get her, I committed a cowardly crime. I broke my parole, as it were, with you. I deserve every epithet of dishonour as regards that which you like to heap upon me, but to carry on this horrible, hideous blackmail — by God, I can't do it. Last night has turned me into a moral man. I'll forswear sack and live cleanly for the rest of my life. I could vomit with disgust. It is *écœurant*, — makes one's heart retch! Do you know what I've found out? You asked me once whether my father

did n't make me an allowance. That put me on the track last night. I cross-questioned, found out that for years and years Mr. Lanyon, besides submitting to my father's extortion, had given him £400 a year to be handed to me as an allowance; and I 've never in my life received a penny of it, so help me God, never! Your father has made atonement, every atonement. I learn that he has been sucked dry, and that there is nothing left for you. It is I who now must make atonement for my father. Could blackmail be more abject than his? Consider for one ghastly moment the nature of it. In the name of charity, for the sake of what is left of my manhood, take back all this money."

He had delivered this harangue with his old fervour and declamatory gestures, and when he had ended he flung himself into an armchair and wiped his brow with his handkerchief. Suddenly he started again to his feet and seized a folded folio document lying on the table.

"See," said he. "I 've been down to Higginson the solicitor this morning, and executed a deed of gift, making the whole thing over to you, less the legacy duty. For

Heaven's sake, take it and let me feel an honest man again."

Sylvester read through the document. Then he folded it up and put it in his pocket.

"The three thousand I 'll take," he said. "The remainder, with your permission, I 'll give to the Prisoners' Aid Society ; my father took a keen interest in it."

"Anything, so long as I don't touch it," said Roderick, lighting another cigarette. "Ha ! Now I feel free, and can take up the threads of life again. By the way, when you go, think as charitably of my father as you can. I 've done with him for ever and ever, but I 've explained him to myself. He is a perfect type of the non-moral being, the instinctive criminal. There's a family history which you as a physician would find interesting. To me as a poor devil of an artist, it is a bogey which only walks abroad in the night of my mind. I suppose I have a share in the family taint, but as I hope never to propagate my species, it will die with me."

He rattled on in his vehement way, and once more Sylvester fell under the spell of his exuberant personality, preferring to listen than to speak. Roderick launched out into a fore-

cast of his future. He would forswear sack, he repeated, and live cleanly, with Art for his chaste mistress. "I got an idea for a picture, this morning, that is going to revolutionise my existence," said he. Sylvester's acceptance of the deed of gift was like the removal of a heavy stone that had held prisoner his elvish spirit. And the more he approached the Roderick of six months ago, the more did Sylvester wonder at the nature of the man. Yet his pocket held irrefutable proof of the man's sincerity. At last he rose and held out his hand. Roderick looked at him, and looked at the hand in astonishment; then he strode a pace forward and grasped it eagerly.

"You are a good fellow to shake hands with me," said he.

The ring of genuine feeling touched Sylvester deeply.

"Let us bury the past," he replied.

"On my side, God knows how willingly."

"And whether we are friends or not, we'll remember that the same mother bore us."

Roderick bowed, his quick perception divining the cost at which the words were uttered.

"I shall always remember it," he said soberly.

He accompanied his visitor down the stairs to the front porch of the old-fashioned hotel. The men shook hands again. Roderick disappeared in the gloom of the corridor, and Sylvester turned to see, on the other side of the street, Ella, out on some small shopping errand, watching him in amazement.

He crossed the road and walked by her side.

"Your question of this morning is answered," he said.

"Thank you, Syl," she replied.

"Perhaps I shall be able to keep Woodlands, after all."

"I was praying for it," she said significantly.

Two days afterwards Ella left for the south of France with Lady Milmo, and Sylvester returned to town to prepare his gloomy house for Dorothy's reception.

CHAPTER XXII

A GLORIOUS WORLD

Two years passed and brought with them their changes, sudden and gradual. A few months after Matthew Lanyon's death, old Ebenezer Usher died of an apoplectic fit. Ruin was staring him in the face. Of all the moneys he had extorted only a few hundreds remained. Peter Vavasour & Co. and others of their bucket-shop confraternity had sucked him dry as he had sucked Matthew. Indignation at the wickedness of mankind killed him and he went to his own place. His effects were sold, and the considerable sum that was realised — for his collections of china, postage stamps, and book plates were remarkably fine — was handed over by Roderick, still zealous to atone, to Sylvester, who paid it into the funds of the Prisoners' Aid Society. And this was the end of Ebenezer Usher. The grass grows over the grave wherein he lies, some twenty yards away from his enemy.

No tombstone marks, or ever will mark, the spot. "He is not the kind of man whose memory one cares to perpetuate," said his son.

Miss Lanyon lived at Woodlands, where sometimes Ella and sometimes Dorothy stayed with her; and now and then for change of scene went Sylvester. He could not realise the old man's dream, and live there, devoting himself to research, but it comforted him to know that the house had not passed into alien hands. His own home in Weymouth Street was gladdened by a child's presence, and the spirit of its desolation departed. Instinctively he felt that it was too gloomy for a child, and with the pathetic helplessness of an inartistic man who had never concerned himself about such things, he took her with him to choose new wall papers, curtains, and rugs. Perhaps the result was incongruous, but at any rate it was bright, and pleased the choosers mightily.

The effect of the great revolution in Sylvester's attitude to life gradually grew more apparent. The intense humanity of his profession won to his heart now that the barriers of ice were melted. The intellectual problem which

it had been his duty to solve became the hurt to a suffering creature which it was his privilege to heal. A new tenderness softened his nature. The gift of speech came to him as by the miracle of the gift of tongues. To his great wonder, the society of ordinary kindly men and women, from which in a general way he had shrunk all his life through shyness and reserve, and which in positive misanthropy he had afterwards shunned, gradually appeared to him a sweet and pleasant thing, until he recognised it as a necessity in his existence. And old feelings, sweeter, sadder, infinitely deeper than of old, were reawakened.

How it came about he knew not. When he had parted from Ella after his father's funeral, he did not love her. He had realised the irrevocable loss of a happiness that might have been, and that was all. Then on her return from the south of France late in the spring he had seen her and spoken with her, and she had been kind. A month afterwards he had seen her again, and once more six months after that, — for they rarely met. And then he knew that she was the one woman in the world for him, and that the love for which he had kissed her years ago was as

moonlight unto the sunlight of his present love.

Once more they had met, and he told her.

"How can I love you when you have done so much to hurt me?" she said.

"I don't ask for your love," he urged.

"You do," she replied with a smile of wisdom. "Don't deceive yourself, Syl."

"Well, then, I will make you love me."

"Don't speak like that," she said with a shiver. "It is horrible to make a woman love. There is no woman made to love that does not repent it in shame and misery."

"But you once did love me."

"You have hurt me. Life has hurt me," she said gently. "I don't mean to say that it was not partly my own fault, nor do I want to pose as an injured woman. But the fact remains, Syl, dear; and you must let time do what it can in the way of healing. If you care for me, see me a little oftener than you have done, — it will be good for both of us, — but don't speak of this again."

"Am I to go through a term of probation?" he asked.

"Heaven forbid!" said Ella.

There the matter remained. They met

more frequently, became fast friends, and Sylvester waited. And so the two years slipped by.

It was a hot August day, and Lady Miimo sat in the verandah of the little hotel at Vitznau at the foot of the Righi, with a novel open on her lap. Her eyes were fixed idly upon a little speck of a boat on the lake by whose sides rose rhythmically tiny silver flashes.

"Why don't you come *unexpectedly* upon us here?" she had written to Sylvester, of whose arrival in Zermatt a chance-met wandering acquaintance had told her. "You will find the Righi *much* more satisfactory than that silly Jungfrau. And you will find *two* people quite disposed to be very kind to you."

So Sylvester had left his ice-axes and ropes and mountaineering boots at Zermatt, and had flown on the wings of hope to Vitznau, and there he was with Ella in the little boat on the lake.

Soon an approaching steamboat from Lucerne hid the tiny speck from Lady Milmo's view, and gradually drew near. The inmates of the hotel came on to the verandah to watch the landing of the passengers, the morning's excite-

ment. The gangway was thrust forward from the little jetty, and the crowd streamed ashore, — fresh English girls in straw hats, substantial fathers, anxious, lonely ladies with profusion of hand-baggage, Germans girt with satchel and vasculum, pacing sultanesquely in front of their womenkind, English parsons, happy and perspiring, — all amidst a sort of tangled undergrowth of umbrellas, and straps, and sticks, and alpenstocks purchased in Lucerne with the burnt-in names of inaccessible peaks circling round them. Some proceeded at once to the tiny railway station where the grotesquely slanting train awaited them. Others poured on to the verandah and took possession of the hotel. The gong for *déjeuner* sounded. Lady Milmo looked anxiously at her speck, which had become visible again, and then at her watch. The occupants of the boat gave no sign of returning shorewards. They would be late for *table d'hôte*. Lady Milmo waved her pocket-handkerchief until she was the last person on the verandah, and then she went into the *salle-à-manger* alone, feeling somewhat injured.

Meanwhile, the two in the boat had been rowing idly over the lake. Ella lay back on

the cushions of the stern with half-closed eyes, while Sylvester sculled lazily. She had been very glad to see him when he arrived the evening before, and her heart had given him a little unbidden throb of welcome. His altered attitude towards her, as well as dim gleams of revelation of some fundamental change within him, had caused her to forget, or at least look back unresentfully upon old wrongs. At times an inflection of the voice, a sudden gentleness of manner, brought his father vividly back to her. It seemed as if, by some strange metempsychosis, the old man's spirit had entered into the son, and was gradually unfolding. He was still the worthiest man she knew. She lived her old life amid the jargon of culture in her aunt's house, and it wearied her, and she longed for something nobler. In Sylvester she found at least reality. She beheld him a sane, sincere, strong man, around whose life was gathered an indeterminate pathos.

The sun shone bright from a deep blue sky flecked here and there with an infinitely distant wisp of cirrus. The tiny promontories jutted out their green into the lake. Far away rose the glittering white snow-peaks, and close at hand the mass of the Righi with white

specks of habitations nestling in its sides. The water plashed pleasantly against the side of the boat. Ella murmured of the loveliness around.

"The day seems to have got into my heart," she said. "If you looked into it, you would see everything as in a camera. I wish it would last."

"Why should n't it?" asked Sylvester, leaning on his sculls.

"We are going away to-morrow."

"There is a way in which I at least could keep this in my heart for ever," said he.

"I would that could be a way for me too," she murmured.

"Why not, dear? I have waited for you."

She looked round upon the tremulous beauty of sky and lake and mountain with a wistful sense of its transience. Her heart was very womanly.

"It would be a way for me, if there were not something between us, Syl," she answered, —"something that keeps us apart. I don't know what it is."

"If I could remove it —?" he began.

Their eyes met. He suddenly took to

his oars and began to pull with vigorous strokes.

"We are going to land," he said.

They were silent until they had reached the foot of one of the little promontories. Then, finding a convenient landing-place, he clambered out and helped her ashore.

"Let us sit down, dear," he said, when he had made fast the boat. "I have a great deal to tell you."

And there in the cool shade of the pine-trees, with the quivering noon-tide haze between them and the great stretch of lake, he told her all his story: of Constance and Leroux, of the awful frost that had frozen his heart, of his father and the elder Usher, of his own lack of right to the name he bore, of his father's death-bed. He spoke continuously in an earnest undertone, although their solitude was broken only by the twitter of birds and the soft whirring of summer insects. Ella, sitting a little way apart, kept silent and never stirred save to look up at him from time to time with piteous wonder in her eyes. And as the old man's tragedy was unfolded before her, the tears brimmed over and fell down her cheeks. Thus all the dark places were made light to

her. The man's soul was revealed. She felt humbled, of small account, as though admitted unworthy into some holy place of sacred things, where sin and suffering were washed away by a divine pity. He ended abruptly.

"That's all the story," said he; "you must judge us both as you think best."

For a moment she sat silent, as her heart was too full for speech; but her hand, that had some while since found its way into his, gave him a soft sign of sympathy. At last words came.

"I understand all, Syl, — both you and him."

"That means forgiving all."

"Yes, all."

"Thank God!" he whispered.

There was a silence. Their souls held communion, the barrier between them being broken down. We have passed through pain and sorrow, ran the mutual message, and our hearts have been made exceeding pitiful, and love at last dwells therein. And for a season time stood still.

Ella looked through the mist of her tears at the splendour of the day. Suddenly the mist cleared, and the splendour was eclipsed by the

dawning of a newer glory. Sylvester saw it in her eyes. With a cry of passionate joy he flung his arms around her, and she gave her life to him utterly.

They rowed back across the lake, and the beauty of earth enfolded them. Once he paused, and their eyes drank deep of each other. At length she smiled.

"The world is a glorious place," she said.

THE END

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